



WHAT IS AMERICA ?



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BY

HERBERT AGAR

*Author of "The American Presidents"*

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TO  
DOUGLAS JERROLD



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INTRODUCTION  
CULTURE OR COLONIALISM?





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## INTRODUCTION

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### I

DURING six years of living in England I learned one basic fact about my own country. I learned that the best traits in the life of America are not the traits she has copied from Europe, but the traits she has freely adapted, or else originated—the traits which are her own. I learned that in so far as America is an imitation of Europe, she is not so good as the original. This merely means that in so far as Americans are a colonial race they share the usual shortcomings of colonialism. “Society” life in the big cities of America is an example. “Society” has, of course, become ridiculous all over the Western world. The bourgeois revolution of the nineteenth century, the rise of stock-market wealth to a power and prestige overshadowing landed wealth, doomed urban “society” to a comic section end. But granting that it is absurd everywhere, “society” in New York or Chicago is more absurd than in London. In London, something that once had dignity and purpose has grown sick and silly; in Chicago, something sick and silly has been carefully improvised. A colonial status is a poor one at best; it becomes abject in a period when the model is not worth copying.

Modern American art offers a similar example. In so far as American art is a copy of French Modernism, it is colonial and inferior. As Mr. Thomas Craven writes: “Those who regard art as modish decoration, as inarticulate embellishment, have every reason to favour

French Modernism, and every incentive to buy it. And it is more sensible to buy the original manufactures than the American imitations. Truly, they order these material things better in France. In the exhibition at the Chicago Fair, the French painters of the modern School of Paris made the American painters attached to that school look seedy and second-rate." But there is another American art, such as that of Mr. Thomas Hart Benton, which has nothing to do with French Modernism, with Bohemia's abstract aloofness from Europe's passion and despair. This other art deals with American life, and with the part of American life that is not colonial. For side by side with the colonialism there is an America which might make an original contribution to the culture of Christendom.

The Colonial mind at its silliest is shown in American veneration for French cooking. Even in the South, where the native cooking will bear comparison with the cooking of any land, it is almost impossible in a first-class hotel to get anything but base imitations of the French. In a city of Tennessee, a hotel has carried this tendency one step further than is usual: over the door of its grill-room is a large sign reading, *Le Grillé*. But even in this sombrely named room, with its suggestion of a roasted heretic, the French cooking is vile and the American cooking does not exist. Presumably, the hotel managers know their business. Presumably the travelling American public wants Parisian dishes even if they are always limp and tasteless, rather than American dishes to which the local cooks could do justice. But if this is true, the travelling public is colonial-minded.

Since I grew up in one of America's colonial big cities, I had to live abroad for years, had to learn from experience that colonial America is nothing to be proud of, before I began to put a proper value on the native, the real, America. And after I had begun to value it, I

still found it strangely hard to define, or even to describe impressionistically. When I tried to trace it in history, I found that although many men agreed there was such a thing as a native America, no man had told us *what* it was. And when I came home to look for it, and spent twelve months travelling up and down the country, I began to see why it was elusive. The first step toward making it less elusive is to make a sharp distinction between the two Americas—the colonial and the native. The present chapter tries to make this distinction, even at the risk of overstating the differences.

## 2

The town of Sheridan,<sup>1</sup> in the Middle West, illustrates the two Americas, and also the half-conscious fight taking place between them—a fight that will determine America's future.

Sheridan is a suburb of one of the giant cities. Its population increased from thirty-seven thousand in 1920 to sixty-three thousand in 1930. But Sheridan is not yet "suburban." Having a strong local pride, it has thus far kept its own identity. It has not become merely another dormitory to the giant city. It still has the character of a Middle Western small town. But it will not have this character for long, if recent tendencies continue unchecked into the future. For Sheridan is living on its spiritual capital. It is using the virtues that are left over from the past rather than tending the soil from which those virtues grew. Native America will not win its fight unless it grows more conscious of the danger, more vigilant in defence.

The most striking feature of life in Sheridan is that a feeling of equality is still almost universal, at least among the whites. It is an unforced equality, which is

<sup>1</sup> This is a real town, which I am calling by a made-up name because I am using the town for what is typical in it, not for what is individual.

so widely accepted that it does not need to call attention to itself. A delivery-boy will meet the wife of a college professor on the street, and will wave his hand at her and call out, "Hello, there, Mrs. Holt; you're looking just fine to-day." The clerk at the grocery store will say, "Good morning, Mrs. Holt. Why, you've washed your hair." And the ice-man will find Mrs. Holt digging in her garden, and will stop to tell her, "Don't plant your tulips there—it's too shady. Plant them over by that wall, where they'll have a chance to grow."

Social democracy of this sort is, of course, widespread in rural America. But there are few towns, and fewer suburbs to great cities, where it still is dominant. And in the big cities themselves it is giving way more and more to a nasty caricature of equality: a defensive smartness that has none of the virtues of equality and none of the virtues of a class-system.

Relations between people of different incomes, backgrounds, and education can be made smooth either by the institution of equality or by the institution of social classes. Either will work agreeably; either will promote human dignity. The one thing that will not work agreeably is a mixture of the two, which often occurs in American big cities. When you get into a New York taxi-cab wearing a top hat, your driver may be a friendly soul who assumes that in spite of your clothes you are human. In that case he will give you a trial, and at the next red light will start on murder, politics, or the strange habits of the taxi-riding public. On the other hand, your driver is quite as likely to be a man who not only believes in classes, but who believes, reasonably enough, that his own class is unenviable. The sight of your top hat will not soothe him. He will make it clear that he thinks you neither useful nor pretty. For with the exception of the small group of trained domestic servants, the American who is class-conscious has become so in

order to vent a grievance, commonly a just grievance, against society. He therefore gets no comfort from the American system of equality, and no comfort from the foreign system of classes.

The Englishman, on the other hand, who believes he has a "place," who can define that "place" exactly, and who respects it, does not feel hampered by the class-system; he feels protected. He has been given a form, or fiction, with the help of which he can deal comfortably with people who are very different from himself. Go into a "pub." in an English village and the crowd in the bar-parlour will fall silent. You may think they are silent out of respect for your exalted position. That was what a friend of mine thought (he is professor of history at an American University), and he was indignant at such servility. He should have saved his anger. The English countryman is unimpressed by shiny shoes or city clothes. The silence is curiosity. And so far from finding the stranger an object of awe, the company is judging him. First they want to classify him; then they want to know whether they like him. If they do, and he has enough information to join in their talk, he will find how class distinctions can smooth out social intercourse. And if they don't like him, he will find what a clear and splendid difference there is between being granted "superior" social position and being looked up to, or even tolerated.

The English system is just as good a way of securing ease and stability in social relations as is the American system. Each system is a fundamental social institution, affecting the whole life of the community. Each system is a factor in the culture of the country where it has been established. Each system, while working healthily, ensures against class-consciousness in the Marxian sense. But neither system, to-day, is working healthily. The American system, like the English, is

living on momentum from the past, and may die with the present generation unless the conditions that bred the system are kept alive.

It is heartening to find Sheridan preserving its social democracy on the doorstep of a giant city where "equality" has no meaning at all, where a landless, toolless Marxian proletariat faces a Marxian bourgeoisie. There are several reasons why Sheridan has been able to do this. In the first place, it has kept a high standard in its public schools.<sup>1</sup> Practically all the children of the town, therefore, are sent to these schools, so that the boy who grows up to be an ice-man and the girl who grows up to be the wife of a college professor may have sat side by side in class. This is often said to be customary in America; but it has long been quite uncus- tomary among people who, like many citizens of Sheridan, could afford to send their children to private school.

In the second place, there is no class of very rich people in Sheridan, and hardly any very poor. Though there is a wide range of income, there is no fantastic gulf of the sort that makes "equality" a joke. In the third place, the sense of civic pride among the citizens has been so strong that the town provides a number of amenities for all—not only cultural amenities, but abundant tennis-courts, swimming-beaches, and the like. These are well kept, with the result that the rich feel no need of having their own tennis-courts, their own bath-houses and strips of beach. And not being over-rich, they feel no need of advertising their pride. So they all use the communal facilities. In the fourth place, there is a University in Sheridan, and the University has a large group of students from Middle Western farms where social democracy is as natural as breathing.

This equality which still lingers in Sheridan, making

<sup>1</sup> A "public" school in America corresponds to an elementary school in England.

the half-hour drive from the huge neighbouring city seem a bridge between two worlds, is a vital part of American culture. But what of the city, the antithesis to Sheridan? If the giant city grows and flourishes, Sheridan will die. And the city, with its skyscrapers, millionaires, gangsters, and polyglot proletariat,—is not the city typical of America, too? Yes; but it is not typical of American culture. It is my thesis that the city stands for the other America—big, loud, and unself-confident as a new boy at school, but not half so native as Sheridan, not half so well-rooted, and in the end not half so strong.

Since Sheridan survived 1929, it may never be engulfed. It is still threatened, but its old character is not yet gone. Perhaps Sheridan will turn back and save the institutions which gave it that character, instead of accepting its metropolitan doom. If it does, the moment when the tide turns, the moment when the city stops encroaching on its tiny neighbour, will be an important moment in the story of American culture, and an important moment in world history. Before explaining how I can hope for such an event, I must make a digression on the meaning of the phrase "American culture." In common speech the phrase has little meaning, or else a meaning that is clear but trivial.

## 3

In the advertising columns of the *American Magazine* for November, 1934, there is a sample of the popular use of the word, culture. "At Palm Beach and Nassau, California and Cannes," reads the caption under a picture, "every year they flock by scores—those smart, cultured women with enough money to indulge the slightest whim. And the number of them who use Listerine Tooth Paste is amazing."

And in the *Saturday Evening Post* for December 1st,



1934, in an article called "An Industrial Design for Living," the following sentences occur: "Our nation has been on the receiving end of a cultural movement the like of which would be hard to imagine. All the colleges, all the magazines, the newspapers and the movies, have been indoctrinating people with the idea of beauty in person, in clothing and in background, until they have developed an appetite for such things beyond ordinary comprehension."

Here we have two of the commonest uses of the word: culture as female wealth and smartness, and culture as a consumer's demand for beauty, a demand that has been whipped up by "all the colleges, all the magazines, the newspapers, and the movies." The first use of the word is silly enough to be harmless. People are in no danger of believing that a cultured nation is a nation composed chiefly of beautiful, bare young women "with enough money to indulge the slightest whim." But the second use is evil, for it leads to misunderstanding. It is a form of the heresy that culture is a thing which can be stored in libraries and museums. Culture, in this sense, is not a way of life, but something you learn at school, like plane geometry, or something you catch, like measles. If you have learned it or caught it, if you have "been on the receiving end of a cultural movement," then you will know about beauty and will want some of it. And if you want beauty you will go to the shops where it is for sale and buy as much as you can afford, or as much as you have room for at home.

This is the industrial-commercial view of culture, as is made clear in the *Saturday Evening Post* article, which continues as follows:

The old-time pioneers who pushed beyond the Alleghanies felt that they had a continent to explore, and, if your mind runs that way, to exploit. But we who came after them, or rather, out of them, have lived into a time when the pioneering has

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come into something richer than a green continent. It is a fertile region that lies somewhere between the human intelligence and the human soul. Developing it will provide plenty of work for all the machines that can be contrived and all the labour that exists.

The last sentence is perfect. The "pioneers" are done with exploring North America, and they find themselves with quite a lot of redundant machinery on their hands. So they decide to "develop" the "fertile region that lies somewhere between the human intelligence and the human soul." By "developing" it they mean making it "beauty-conscious"; they mean teaching it to want goods and gadgets that have "eye-appeal." If you are in the market for goods with "eye-appeal," you have culture. Your "fertile region" has been developed. Of course, as the inventors turn out more and more machines, we shall have to get more and more cultured. In the course of time even our tooth-paste and our telephones will have "eye-appeal." Everything we buy will be beautiful, and we'll buy an astonishing lot (for yesterday's eye-appeal can always be made into to-day's eye-sore). In this way America should become the most cultured nation in the world's history.

This industrial-commercial view of culture, which sees it as the next field for industry "to explore, and, if your mind runs that way, to exploit," flourished during the years when Big Business was glorified. During the 1920's there were people who thought that as soon as Mr. Hoover finished solving the problem of poverty, Americans would apply sound business principles to the Higher Life, and would shortly be delivering large packages of beauty and truth to every taxpayer. To-day such people, though less hopeful about Mr. Hoover, still think that culture can be "laid on" like gas or water. They believe that if only a group of technocrats, or bureaucrats, or commissars, would organize things so

that the whole working population would have mechanical jobs for four hours a day and freedom for twenty, the national demand for Higher Life would be too surprising for words. They may be right, for what they mean by higher life is reading "good books," going to concerts and picture-galleries, and listening to lectures. None of these pastimes has any necessary connection with culture. The American public, for example, might spend its time reading Greek and Roman literature, looking at Italian and Dutch paintings, hearing German and Russian music, and attending lectures by visiting playwrights from Vienna and Budapest. The result would probably be a nation of prigs. I see no reason to think it would be a nation with culture. "If I read as many books as that man," said Hobbes, "I'd be as big a fool as he." "Beware of the man who would rather read than write," warns Bernard Shaw. Beware of the nation whose culture means admiring the creativeness of other people.

The *Pittsburg Sun-Telegraph* for February 25th, 1935, ran the following editorial:

Andrew W. Mellon, former Secretary of the Treasury, spent more than \$4,000,000 to buy six famous paintings, five of them from Soviet Russia. He planned to build a great art museum in Washington to house his famous collection of pictures, worth about \$19,000,000.

One by one he bought at huge prices great works of art from European collections in order to realize his dream of making Washington the art capital of the world.

Mr. Mellon is proof of the utter falsity of the conception, once so widespread abroad, of American millionaires as ruthless money-grubbing materialists.

In no other nation on earth, at no other time in history, have great individual fortunes so generously served the permanent scientific and artistic interests of mankind as here.

This is the perfect expression of false, colonial, imitative culture. The thought that Washington could become

"the art capital of the world" by becoming the storehouse for a lot of Italian and Flemish and Byzantine paintings is a thought that does no honour to the human mind. Just as a city is a place where people live, not a place where they are buried, so an art capital is a place where art is produced, not a place where it is put away. And, as I hope to show, there is a real incompatibility between the production of a living art and the production of too many Mellons.

If the industrial-commercial concept of culture is dismissed to its proper home in the advertising columns, how can the word be re-defined so that it can throw light on American life? As a prelude to trying such a re-definition, American life must be placed in a scheme of world history.

## 4

Until quite recently the prevailing theory of history was the one devised to fit the nineteenth-century theory of progress. It showed man as advancing, in the course of a few thousand years, from a shocking and brutal-looking ancestor with long hair and a club to something quite commendable, like Mr. H. G. Wells. The advance was usually shown in two parts: first the advance from cave-man to classical civilization; then, after a brief relapse during the Dark Ages, a further advance to the mechanical triumphs of the modern world. The picture is a perfect example of false conclusions drawn from facts which are true but inadequate.

It is true that man was once a primitive nomad, possessing none of the arts of civilization. It is true that man, in certain parts of the world, has now become something which may fairly be symbolized by Mr. Wells. It is true that from our point of view Mr. Wells is more engaging than the cave-man, which means that there has been progress. But what is quite untrue is the assump-

tion underlying so much progressive thought, that this advance has been along one fairly constant line, that millennium by millennium the progress has continued, and that it can be described in some such terms as a steadily increasing power to control the physical environment, or a steadily increasing store of real and final knowledge, or a steadily increasing friendliness toward larger and larger groups of people—a friendliness that began with the family unit and is destined to end by embracing the world state. This outmoded nineteenth-century view of progress was summarized by Woodrow Wilson when he told an audience that “all through the centuries there has been this slow painful struggle forward, forward, up, up, a little at a time, along the entire incline, the interminable way.”

It is a comforting view, for it suggests that if man refrains from committing suicide he will grow better and better until the time comes when he will have every reason for self-satisfaction. Such a theory of history transplants the Garden of Eden from the past, where it provoked nostalgia, into the future, where it provokes a lively hope. Heaven is transplanted out of space, where it was unattainable except by the grace of God, into time, where it becomes merely a question of patience, like waiting for the next train. But for all its soothing qualities the theory is now dying. It has been mortally hurt by the work done during the last thirty years in archæology, anthropology, comparative religion, and literature. Its place is being taken by a more complicated and less flattering view, which has at least the merit that it can be reconciled to the known facts.

The old division of history into Ancient, Mediæval, and Modern is being scrapped. It cut straight across the facts, separating events that belonged together and joining others that had nothing in common. Instead of one long gratifying advance, with ourselves as the latest

and most improved model of humanity, what history really shows is a series of high Cultures passing through similar stages of growth and decay. In China, in Mexico, in India, in Mesopotamia, in Egypt, and now at last in our own West, we can trace this pattern. Out of a group of farming settlements a new culture is born, no one knows why. The challenge of life is suddenly met by a new affirmation. A new statement is made of man's old faith that life has a meaning and that the meaning is good. In our case, in the years between 500 and 1000 A.D. this birth took place in Western Europe. The Christian affirmation defined itself; it permeated the spirit of Western man; it began to find expression in social institutions which were to form the thought and manners of a continent.

The new culture, of course, may be much influenced by the remains of a previous civilization which occupied the same, or neighbouring, lands—just as the emerging Western culture was influenced by the Classical. But the basic affirmation of the new culture, though it may be built on many foreign contributions, will be its own, will be characteristic. The Christianity of the West clearly rests on Hebrew, Classical, and Arabian foundations. Yet the religion of Western man is not just a version of a religion from Asia Minor, or from any other part of the dying Roman world. It is a new thing, born with Western culture and unlikely to survive it.

No historian can say why this new thing came to birth during those centuries, and in just that part of the world. But once the thing is born (and assuming that it is given a chance to grow, that it is not wiped out by force), the historian can predict certain stages through which it is likely to pass. He can predict, in the first place, that the life-drama of the new Culture will take the form of a conflict between the deep instinctive faith which is the essence of the Culture and an abstractly rationalizing

self-destructive element which is a feature of man's mind. He can predict that religion (the expression of this deep faith) will dominate in the early period of the Culture, that art and abstract thought will for a time be religion's servant. (For Western man, this is the period from the birth of his Culture to about the end of the thirteenth century.)

The historian can predict that a little later there will be a second stage, where a more even balance is attained. The inquiring, self-probing mind becomes steadily more confident. Art and thought are secularized, though they are still for the most part in harmony with religion. They have not yet begun their final task of tearing up their own roots. (This is the period corresponding, roughly, to the years 1300-1700 in Western Europe.)

The historian could also predict the character of the third period—which has proved the last great period of every previous Culture. In this period the perilous balance between faith and critical thought slowly breaks down. The questioning, nihilistic mind, which in the beginning was religion's servant, and in the second period its ally, becomes its master. The instinctive faith weakens; the critical and analytical power is left undirected. In its new freedom it knows a burst of energy. The ardour of the human spirit, which was once shared between heaven and earth, is now lavished solely on practical ends. The results are impressive. In every culture this is the time of imperial expansion, of great world-cities, of mechanical triumphs: the giant buildings of Luxor, the Great Wall of China, the straight proud Roman roads across the body of Europe, the straight proud steel belittling the American sky. This is the time when man learns to do so many striking things that his brain is warped with his own grandeur and he makes the mistake of thinking he understands the forces he is using. This is the period reached

by Western man in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The historian could go still further. On the basis of the same analogy with other cultures he could predict what is likely to be the mood and meaning of Western man's next stage. There is clearly no proof to these predictions; they are not a doom imposed upon us; but they are a useful warning, for hitherto none of the many cultures of which we have knowledge has escaped this final stage. Seeing what happened in the periods comparable to our twentieth century in the Classical world, in the Cultures of Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, and China, the historian can say that instead of being on the verge of a final triumph Western man is probably on the verge of despair. For the crowning work of man's criticism, having discredited the thought and religion of the past, is to discredit the mind that criticizes. At the moment when intelligence dreams it is about to reach out and explain all things, it wakes to the annihilating theory that explanations are relative, that one is often as good—or as bad—as another. The mind which has dissolved the basic faith on which the whole culture rested, ends by dissolving itself, ends in Classical scepticism, ends in Eastern despair, ends in European nihilism and relativity. For the rootless intellect means nothing, leads nowhere, and cannot even sustain the will to struggle. At the highest point of the Civilization's physical achievement, this poisonous doubt strikes it, and it falls.

When a people have reached this stage of disillusionment, the rest of their story can be imagined. They can still do all their mechanical tricks, but the heart has gone out of such tricks except for the silly few who can enjoy themselves doing nothing but make money. The old faith in religion has faded under the attacks of the critical mind; the new faith in reason has proved a



fraud under the self-slaughtering honesty of the same mind. And then appears one of the strangest but most often repeated facts of history. Man is stricken with sterility. In his giant cities he finds himself too bored or too un zestful even to breed normally. Rome was weak with depopulation long before the barbarians pulled her down. Just as the birth of every culture-cycle is marked by a new affirmation of life, the end is marked by a hospitality to death. Man lies down tired in the midst of his marvels. His numbers dwindle, his cities stand half empty, and once again the beasts of the wilderness prowl among ruined buildings.

Spengler reminds us that "Samarra was abandoned by the tenth century; Pataliputra, Asoka's capital, was an immense and completely uninhabited waste of houses when the Chinese traveller, Hsinan-tang, visited it about A.D. 635." And he cites a whole group of late Classical writers—Polybius, Strabo, Pausanias, Dio Chrysostom, Avienus—who tell "of old, renowned cities in which the streets have become lines of empty crumbling sheels, where the cattle browse in forum and gymnasium, and the amphitheatre is a sown field, dotted with emergent statues and herms." And Mr. Charles Francis Atkinson adds that in the days of the Roman decline, "the amphitheatres of Nîmes and Arles were filled up by mean townlets that used the outer wall as their fortifications." The turn of the population-tide in the Western world is clearly foreshadowed to-day.<sup>1</sup>

In succeeding ages, after such a decline has run its

<sup>1</sup> In a recent report, The Census Bureau of the United States classed one out of every three married couples as "childless," a figure which shows a marked increase in childless marriages even since 1930. If divorced families, or those broken by death, were included, the percentage of childlessness would be even greater. In 1930, out of 23,352,990 couples, 7,447,328 had no children; 5,254,863 couples had one child; 4,246,459 couples had two children; 2,650,730 couples had three children; and only 3,753,610 couples had four or more children.

course, the dwindled population takes refuge in the countryside, where, if not attacked from without, it multiplies until it pushes on the limits of subsistence, until it reaches the state of the teeming agricultural East.

A civilization, therefore, may simply fall into inner desuetude, enduring for millenniums as the booty of successive conquerors, like Egypt, or China, or India. But a civilization may also die suddenly, not merely looted but murdered, as happened to Mexico at the hands of the Spaniards. Here was one of the most dramatic confrontations in history: an old civilization where doubt and relativity had clearly done their corrosive work, and a group of energetic bandits from a world that still had trust in itself.

Tenochtitlan was an imperial city, on a scale that Western man was not to create for centuries. "We were amazed," wrote Bernal Diaz del Castillo, who fought with Cortez, "and said that it was like the enchantment they tell of in the legend of Amadis, on account of the great towers and cues and buildings rising from the water, and all built of masonry. And some of our soldiers asked whether the things that we saw were not a dream. . . . I do not know how to describe it, seeing things as we did that had never been heard of or seen before, not even dreamed about." But the simple Spaniard was wrong. Such things had been seen and heard of many times before: in Imperial Rome, in Baghdad and Tell-el-Amarna, in the world-cities of the last years of every civilization.<sup>1</sup> They were to be seen in the Western world after another four hundred years, by which time London and Paris and New York had taken on shapes that would have startled Cortez's soldiers quite as much as did Tenochtitlan—and by which time,

<sup>1</sup> For dates of the origin and probable age of the Mexican civilizations, see H. E. Spinden, *Ancient Civilizations of Mexico*.

in certain deep decisive matters, the point of view of London and Paris and New York was closer to that of the Aztec city than to anything that Cortez's men could have understood.

Montezuma, for example, said to Cortez, "Throughout all time we have worshipped our own gods, and thought they were good, as no doubt yours are." Diaz tells us the Spaniards were amazed at such a remark; but a New York literary critic, in 1935, quotes Montezuma with approval, just after calling Spanish Catholicism "a provincial religion." And the critic represents his age faithfully. It is right that he should approve of Montezuma's relativism: world-city is talking to world-city, and they speak the same language. Montezuma was a "civilized" man. He knew that all truths are relative, that all the high eternal Gods have ruled over comparatively small areas in space and time. He knew, therefore, that it would be banal to fight over religion. But the fierce and greedy Spaniards knew nothing of the sort. They knew that their religion was *true*—not true for them or true for the sixteenth century, but true for all men for ever. So they fell on the tired cosmopolitans of that ageing city, and a handful of men abolished one of the world's marvels.

The New York literary man cannot approve of such self-confidence. He finds it definitely provincial.

*Je suis l'Empire à la fin de la décadence,  
Qui regarde passer les grands Barbares blancs,  
En composant des acrostiches indolents  
D'un style d'or où la langueur du soleil danse.*

Doubtless there were many Aztec nobles who felt just that way.

*Là-bas on dit qu'il est de longs combats sanglants.*

But why should a "civilized" man stir himself to a lot of vulgar fighting?

## 5

This cyclical view of history need not breed pessimism. Spengler, the brilliant popularizer of the view, has used it to vent a pathological despair. As if driven to expiate some enormous guilt, he offers the whole Western world as sacrifice to Fate, and he knows no words too impolite for the victim who demurs. With a scream of italics and exclamation marks, Spengler falls upon him: This is what *has* to be! History cannot be interfered with! Bare your throats and *don't argue*!

I should think, however, that a sincere Christian would be bound to argue, would be bound to insist that a pattern may have repeated itself eight or ten times and still be only a pattern, not a doom. For instance, it is reasonable to predict a sorry end for a man who has become a steady, sodden drunkard; but it would be stupid to say the man was doomed to such an end. He might have a religious conversion and become a saint; he might go crazy and become a prohibitionist. The only safe prediction we can make is that if nothing unusual happens the man will die a sot. Similarly, the only safe prediction about our cosmopolitan civilization is that if nothing unusual happens it will not turn out to be the start of a splendid new era, but the start of another dreary decline. In Europe, the unusual happening might be a revival of Christianity; in America it might be a strengthening of the native, as opposed to the colonial tradition.

While taking this hopeful view, it would be wrong to ignore the warnings implicit in the new theory of history. It is right to reject determinism; it is right to insist that if we have the moral energy we can still save our Christian civilization from the fate which struck all the great civilizations that have gone down to the grave; but it is wrong to let ourselves be soothed by the silly

dream that good must somehow triumph in the end since man has already progressed all the way from the mud to Mr. Henry Ford. Man has certainly progressed; but the point of the story told by modern archæology and history is that man has also declined, and with sinister regularity. He has not pushed steadily on, with a few temporary setbacks. On the contrary, he has risen again and again to what has seemed the top of his powers, and fallen again and again to a level not far above where he began. There are signs to-day that he may be preparing to fall once more, and though my own view of America's future is a hopeful one, it would be stupid not to take these signs into account, not to present my hope against the background of a real danger.

The great dividing line in the history of a high culture (such as the Classical, the Egyptian, or that of Western man) is the line between the second and third periods. On the one side of that line there is still a fruitful tension between instinct and intellect; on the other side the balance has been destroyed and the nihilistic mind has silenced the faith on which the whole culture rested. Spengler uses the word, *Culture*, for the period before that fatal division, and the word, *Civilization*, for the period that follows. The use of the words in this sense is arbitrary; but the distinction he makes is useful for an understanding of America to-day, so I shall adopt it in my book.<sup>1</sup>

In these terms, Sheridan stands for American Culture, the giant city for Civilization. According to the pessimists, who have seized on the cyclical theory of history to justify their best fears, the giant city must win. And it is true that in the past, once the period of civilization has been reached, the clock has never turned back.

<sup>1</sup> And I shall spell the words with an initial capital to call attention to the fact that I am using them in a special, arbitrary meaning.

The world-city, with its cosmopolitanism, its scepticism, its falling birth-rate, its lack of morals, its imitative and then its decadent art—in the past, each time this recurring prodigy has appeared, the stage has been set for an age of Cæsars, of wars and dictatorships and aimless crowds kept quiet by doles, or by bread and circuses. In every characteristic detail, we seem to be giving our own Western version of the dejecting picture. Where our religious life, for example, has not been killed by scepticism, it shows signs of decaying into an eclectic superstition. Like the Romans who brought Isis and Ariman to the Tiber, many Westerners to-day flirt with Buddhism, or follow Hindu fakirs, or make strange mixtures of their own, adding a dash of neo-platonism to a smattering of Lao-Tse.

There are good reasons for pessimism. And I agree with the most despairing that if Civilization (the point of view of the world-city) became dominant in America, if the judgments, the ambitions, the interests, the conditions and habits of life, represented by Chicago and New York became the standard of the country, America would be old without ever having been young. America would be as old as Europe, but hers would be a graceless old age. No maturity, no serene memories, no wisdom—only decrepitude and loss of purpose. She should not be a rich culture drawing to an end with dignity; she should be just another colonial nation going downhill with (or perhaps before) the parent stock, without ever having been anything on her own. She should deserve the jibe flung at her by Mr. Belloc in a magnificent passage where he gives the European Christian's answer to the pessimism that assails Europe :

Our Europe cannot perish [he writes]. Her religion—which is also mine—has in it those victorious energies of defence which neither merchants nor philosophers can understand, and which are yet the prime condition of establishment. Europe,

though she must always repel attacks from within and from without, is always secure; the soul of her is a certain spirit, at once reasonable and chivalric. And the gates of hell shall not prevail against her. . . .

Her component peoples have merged and remerged. Her particular famous cities have fallen down. Her soldiers have believed the world to have lost all, because a battle turned against them, Hittin or Leipzig. Her best has at times grown poor and her worst rich. Her colonies have seemed dangerous for a moment from the insolence of their power, and then again (for a moment) from the contamination of their decline. . . . She will certainly remain.

It is a proud boast. And even the attack on America is not unworthy. An American who has lived long abroad knows too well why foreigners take this view. They hear nothing about America except news from her world-cities, plays and books about her world-cities (or else plays and books and news about her countryside from the point of view of her world-cities). They know America as a Civilization; America as an attempt at a Culture they do not know at all. And how should they? After six years in London I began to wonder, myself, whether there was such an America, or whether I had made it up and called it memory.

Why should Europe respect America as a big-city Civilization? As a Civilization America is derivative and second-hand; she has the instability of people who are not themselves. As a Civilization America is somebody else's Culture grown old. But the American people are not old. And the combination, though surprising, does not breed confidence. In art, in talk, in lack of morals, in cosmopolitan nihilism, New York is old. As old as Vienna, yet as vital as a gold-rush camp. The vitality would be attractive if it were lavished on something young; it is bizarre when it is lavished on decay.

There is no capital in Europe where cynicism and

defeatism are more constant than in New York. But in Europe they are negative qualities, as fits their nature. In Europe they are a mood of tired disdain. In New York they are as boyish and positive as battle-cries. In New York men announce their ironies with a kind of hopeful ardour. The cartoonist, James Thurber, is an illustration. In Europe men are puzzled by Mr. Thurber. Not because they are strangers to his withering view of humanity. Thurber's men and women—small, misshapen, and malignant; sub-human because they have no trace of purpose, no memory of hope; sub-bestial because they have none of the dignity of beasts—Europe is accustomed to this view of human nature. From the early Huysmans to Anatole France to Aldous Huxley, half the cleverest minds have been perfecting it for seventy years. But what perplexes Europe is to find this scornful picture combined with such gaiety. Through all these deadly libels there runs a nursery touch. Enormous rabbits, fantastic misplaced seals, huge comforting dogs—if the men and women could be expunged, these drawings would be decorations for a child's bedroom. The mixture, to someone born in Mr. Thurber's world, is telling. But to many Europeans the mixture is merely distressful. They have their own picture of what age and disillusion should resemble. They do not like to know there can be such things as ancient, contemptuous children.

The mixture of moods that is found in a Thurber drawing is characteristic of New York. These boisterous pessimists, these hearty drunkards, these perverts who declare their barrenness with a happy grin—they make New York an exciting place, a puzzling place. I can see why Europeans should enjoy it, why they should marvel at it. But I cannot see why they should think well of it. I cannot blame them for predicting, like Mr. Belloc, a swift decline.



In Europe, if the soul is growing old, if hope and faith are dying, there is something to fall back on: the eternal tradition of the land, a religion that still makes the lives of millions, a memory of many disasters weathered. But to be old unnaturally, without these memories, without this background, is to be unstable. And Europe, knowing only those spots in America that suffer from an abnormal, derivative old age, rightly judges her unstable. Civilization, in America, is derivative. It is colonial, and hence rootless. New York is colonial and rootless. But the provinces are not colonial. American Culture, so far as there has been one, is not colonial. Sheridan is a new thing in the world, a product of American soil. But in all essentials, Chicago and New York are as old as Luxor—and just about as important to the future.

These generalizations on Culture and the modern world cannot be proved. They are not offered as revelations. They are offered to suggest the main outlines of my thesis about American Culture. The thesis can be summarized as follows: America has the beginning of a Culture. It is derived from Europe, of course, and has the same ancestors as the Culture of Europe; but it has existed long enough to take on a native character. If it were let alone one might hope for an American contribution to history. It has not been let alone. It has been overlaid, and hampered increasingly, by an alien imitative old age, a colonial-minded old age. The story of America to-day is the story of the struggle between these two forces. And there are reasons for hoping that the native America may win.

## PART ONE

### . A CENTURY OF PROGRESS



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## CHAPTER ONE

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### I

THE town of Sheridan does not, of course, show American Culture at its purest. But it shows American Culture threatened and combative, refusing as long as possible to be abolished by the neighbouring world-city. This self-protective instinct is strong over most of the Mississippi Valley.<sup>1</sup> The instinct is commonly misunderstood and abused, laughed at as provincial. When the Mississippi Valley tries to turn its back on Europe, it is not because it hates Europe. It is simply because the Valley has a true instinct that unless it is let alone for a while, unless it is given time to find its own soul and build its own institutions, it will never be of use either to Europe, or to itself, or to anything on earth. Deep in a necessary adolescent interest in its own problems, it does not want to be bothered by the old misery along the Rhine, or along the Great Wall of China. But a swarm of irritating wise men descend on the Valley, telling it that none of its own problems can be solved until it has insured peace for the world, and given a sound currency to the world, and generally made life easy for international finance, or for international communism. The Valley is not clear in its own mind about these things ;

<sup>1</sup> The valley of the Mississippi River, with its great tributaries the Ohio (which is fed by the Tennessee and the Cumberland), the Missouri, the Arkansas, and the Red Rivers, includes twenty-four of the forty-eight States and considerably more than half the territory of the United States. In 1930 the population of the Mississippi Valley was about 57 millions out of about 123 millions for the Continental United States.

but it is quite clear, and quite correct, in feeling sure that the wise men lie.

If America really has to help run the whole world before it has learned to run a single county in Indiana, it might just as well give up; and so might the world.

So far, in discussing native, or provincial, America, I have mentioned only the one trait, equality, as characteristic of the Culture. Before trying to find further traits which make up the elusive whole of American Culture, I must explain how the United States came to be divided into the youth of a local Culture and the age of a colonial Civilization. For the question arises, if the young Culture has the health and strength I attribute to it, why has it failed so far to get its own way?

## 2

The people who settled America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries brought with them a Culture which was still robust but which in one important respect showed signs of wear. This one respect was religion. By the eighteenth century, it took no prophet to see that Protestantism was going to seed. The anglican Protestantism of Virginia was tinged with Deism and with the worldliness of the fox-hunting parson. The Calvinism of New England looked more vital. But there is no need to argue whether it was really vital; the answer is in the single question, Where is it to-day? <sup>1</sup> By the start of the nineteenth century it was ready to dissolve into Unitarianism. By the end of the nineteenth century it had come down to the conscientious indecisions

<sup>1</sup> In 1926 the official figures for church membership in the United States were as follows: Roman Catholics, 18,605,000; Baptists, 8,246,000; Methodists, 8,033,000; Lutherans, 3,939,000; Presbyterians, 2,623,000; Episcopalians, 1,859,000; making a total of 43,305,000 out of a population of about 120,000,000. Except in the case of the Catholic Church the figures for actual communicants would be very much smaller, but no reliable figures are available.

of Henry Adams. To-day, it is symbolized in an experience I had while spending the night with a friend in Boston. His family is one of the best in Massachusetts. His own reputation is international, partly as a man of letters but chiefly as a kind of liberal anarchist, a gallant defender of all the underdogs from pole to pole. If a coolie is hit over the head in India, or an Italian drayman kicks his horse in Rome, if an Irish patriot is shot for treason in Dublin or if an Irish mayor suppresses a book in Boston, my friend will run to the defence, will spend his time and money like water, and will suffer with a hopeless disinterested passion when the end of it all is merely that another injustice is done. In the course of a brave and busy life he has made himself a nuisance to the authorities of two continents. In the mind of the public, he is rebellion personified.

The other night, when I stayed at my friend's house, we drank whisky after dinner. At bedtime my host looked nervously round him and said, "We've got to clean this up." Since he lives alone, with three servants, I wondered why.

"My maids," he explained, "don't approve of drinking. When I have wine at dinner, I have to serve it myself. They'd be very unhappy if they came down in the morning and found this bottle, or found glasses smelling of whisky."

So we put away the bottle, and cleaned the glasses.

Irving Babbitt has pointed out that Calvinism often breaks down into anarchy and the Rousseau type of mind. But the Calvinism seems to leave behind it, as a kind of trade-mark, a queer frustrating sense of guilt.

Every Culture, in the past, has been founded on a religious affirmation; the Culture has grown up with the religion and has been the outward, secular form of the religion. From the beginning, one of America's gravest handicaps has been that her new Culture has

had to rest on a religion that has begun to lose its hold. This would not have mattered had America wished to be merely colonial—to copy Europe at a distance, to give an inferior and slightly delayed version of what went on across the Atlantic. But in so far as America dreamed of being something new, she had to fashion the new thing, and then to preserve it against human greed, without the help of a church that had a real hold over the American heart.

Americans are still reluctant to admit how far the prestige of Protestantism has fallen. I speak only of Protestantism, for Catholicism, though numerically important, has not been a dominant force in making America. Catholicism may turn out to be the residuary legatee of Christendom; but so far as the past of America is concerned, it has never been a decisive influence. America's national religion has been Protestantism, and in large parts of the country Protestantism is defunct.

One Sunday night in the spring of 1935, I was to lecture in the Congregationalist Church of a medium-sized American town. Arriving at the church about an hour early, I looked about for someone to direct me to a restaurant. In the rear of the building I found a room where Sunday School classes were held. There were three men in the room, all in their shirt-sleeves. One sat on a chair that was tilted perilously far back against the wall, ruminantly chewing tobacco. The other two were leaning against the piano, wearily discussing whether they felt badly because of the beer they had drunk with their lunch or because of the food they had eaten with their beer. The atmosphere was that of backstage in the theatre, among a group of scene-shifters. I introduced myself and asked for the nearest good restaurant. The tobacco-chewer spat, stared at me disconcertingly for a minute, and then said:

"There's a Jewish joint a few blocks up the street. You don't look like a Jew. Guess you won't be ashamed to go there."

Impressed by such complicated anti-semitism, I went to the "Jewish joint." When I returned to the church the minister had arrived. He explained to me at once that although I was lecturing in the church, and from a platform that might have regrettable suggestions of a pulpit, I need not fear any nonsense about religious atmosphere. The audience, I was promised, were accustomed to applaud and to ask questions just as if they were in a theatre. Even after all this preparation, I was surprised when the evening's performance began with three warmly sentimental love-songs, rendered by a local young lady.

The tobacco-chewing stage-hand had suggested that the Jews of the neighbourhood were ashamed to be seen in the kosher restaurant. The proprietor of that restaurant should copy the tact of the local minister, who took every precaution lest the Gentiles should feel to their embarrassment that they were in a Christian church.

The minister, however, was doing a good work in the community. He was proud of having trained the mixed audience which patronized his hall to demand, and to enjoy, lectures on the thorniest points in economics. I am not belittling this useful work by saying that when a chief function of the church is to organize forums on economics something is wrong with the religious life.

The Mississippi Valley is the place to learn how far American Protestantism has declined—as a religion, that is, not as a social institution. In the southern part of the Valley, among the poorest of the white tenant farmers, there have grown up a number of semi-savage cults, tragic in their degradation, farcical in their parody



of Christian theology.<sup>1</sup> It is easy to write wittily or nastily about these cults, and the subject has been exploited to the full. But in the northern part of the Valley there is a phenomenon less often mentioned, but perhaps even more dangerous in the end. Again I take Sheridan as an example.

There are lots of Protestant churches in Sheridan, and lots of people attend them. So far as they are given any doctrine at all, these people are taught that "love thy neighbour" is the whole content of Christianity. They are taught to be public-spirited and to respect the civic virtues. This is all very good; but the singular fact remains that the First Commandment is seldom mentioned. Theology is seldom mentioned, which means that nothing is done to put thought content into the great affirmations of Christianity. There could scarcely be a more meaningless sentence than "I believe in God," unless God has been defined—unless the sentence, in other words, has been related to a whole theology. Religion unsupported by a theology is either emotional indulgence, as in much of the lower Valley, or else, as in much of the upper Valley, it is a device for organizing "group spirit."

Among the students at Sheridan University (many of whom are boys and girls from the more prosperous Middle Western farms), there is less religion than I have ever found in any other part of the white man's world. These young people seem never to have had enough faith even to feel the lack of it now that its faint shadow has gone. There are no regrets. There is no

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,  
The other powerless to be born.

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<sup>1</sup> For the most part these cults are officially affiliated with the Baptist or Methodist Churches. They flourish among the negroes and the poor white farmers. Their services degenerate, at the worst, into the orgiastic nastiness described in Mr. Erskine Caldwell's *Journeyman*.

The religion which has died is unknown to these youths. The need for another one to take its place is unsuspected by them. They are content with the here and the now to an astounding degree. They live in a material, sensual world, a world that has few secrets and no mysteries. They live in it with honesty, frankness, friendliness, and great personal satisfaction. They like their world. It does not seem to breed in them either guilt or a romantic sense of unfulfilment. Their flat matter-of-factness is summed up in the comment overheard by a friend of mine, who teaches English literature at the University. Two of his students were discussing Byron.

"What's the matter with this Byron?" asked one.

The other, a girl, answered, "Oh, he just couldn't take it."

The world-picture of these undergraduates is obviously thin and dry, as compared to any world-picture that has nourished the human spirit in the past. Their intellectual life has almost no relation to the experience and tradition from which they have come. Being rootless, it will not survive a bad time. It will blow away in some great American dust-storm such as that which ruined South Dakota in the summer of 1934. But the boys and girls who live in this odd world are healthy, vital, optimistic, and most incongruously contented. They live in comfortable disregard of the superhuman. They are neither in revolt against it, nor in search of it. Religion as social service they find all about them, and they respect. Religion as something relating to God they neither know nor miss.

Why, then, are they so contented? So unburdened with guilt? Why are they so like that folk-myth, Modern Youth? We have all read about Modern Youth—brave and unashamed, he faces life with his eyes open, his mind full of the newest scientific facts, his

imagination clean. Free from superstition, he is not afraid to experiment; free from ignorance, he knows better than to let himself feel guilty; free from shame, he can enjoy this world to the full, so he does not need to solace himself by inventing a world beyond the grave.

I grew up with the first generation of Modern Youth—the people who were just old enough to get into the last eighteen months of the War. As I meet my contemporaries to-day, in London and New York and Paris, the myth seems to have gone a little sour. It has not aged so gracefully as the Unicorn. It no longer seems half so convincing as the Phœnix. Lots of my contemporaries have experimented, but why is there such a high proportion of drunkards or drug addicts? Why do my friends who tell me about the glorious future of the free, unsuperstitious mind, always do their telling when their own minds have been warped by wine? Lots of my contemporaries are unquestionably free from shame; but why are so many of them homosexual, doomed to the most brief and quarrelsome form of love? Lots of them still laugh at the idea of guilt; but why have they such burdened faces? Why such insomnia? Why so much levity combined with so little fun?

Modern Youth in the world-cities, in the centres of Civilization, has not been a success. Plenty of my contemporaries, of course, were not taken in by the myth, and have gone on living the normal life of man. But the boys and girls who were really Free and Unashamed are not doing so well to-day—at least if they practised their new virtues in the cities. There is no external pressure in the big cities; therefore, if there is no internal pressure either (as in the case of a Modern Youth), a man is likely to do pretty much what occurs to him, with horrid results. And the fact that he is not self-conscious enough to know that some part of him is disapproving does not save him, in the long run,

from suffering the disintegrating effects of that self-disapproval. But the average student at Sheridan University, though supported by no faith, no doctrines, no awareness of the superhuman, is still living in a world that imposes protective controls and habits. He seems to have little tendency to become a drunkard, a lecher, or a pervert; whereas Modern Youth in the big cities has a tendency in those directions which is marked. In other words, the local Culture of America, thin and peculiar as it is if judged by standards taken from a richer world, relates in some real way to human needs, or it would not still produce people who are both contented and valuable. In time, the fact that the world in which this Culture is trying to take root has a purely secular, purely mundane point of view, must destroy the Culture's power of resistance. Here again it is a race to see whether the way of life favourable to the Culture can be restored before the Civilization has spread so far as to make an American Culture for ever impossible.

¶ Señor Unamuno wrote that men do not become good by believing in God; rather, they learn to believe in God by being good. Similarly, if Americans should give their local life a chance; if, in the great choice that is before them, they should decide to try to be themselves instead of a shop-worn copy of Europe; it is possible that after building as good a world as they are able, on the native American model, they might find that they had incidentally promoted a revival of Christianity. It is useless to start at the other end, by saying that what people need is to find a religion. As an historical statement, that is probably true; but the statement defeats itself. There is nothing to do about it. If what people need is a religion, the one practical step is to build the sort of world where religion might revive. And I think there is wide agreement that giant cosmo-

politan cities, and Civilization, are unfriendly to the religious impulse.

America was forced to try to build a Culture without the aid of a religion which had real authority. The lack has very nearly made it impossible to build a Culture at all. It would have made it quite impossible had it been a question of starting at the beginning, of building up from a nomadic or barbarous life. But the task was simpler; America had only to tend her transplanted Culture, to give it a chance to alter and develop under the stimulus of a new soil. America may still succeed in this task; if she does, the religion that she needed at the beginning may at least revive within her at the end.

## 3

The first time America had a chance to make institutions after her own heart, unhampered by supervision from the mother-country, was during the Revolutionary War. The State Governments, the Confederation, and the subsequent Union under the Constitution, give a key to the dreams and desires that were stirring the new nation.

Two basic institutions were praised by almost every leader of the revolutionary period: private property and self-government. To the American Fathers both these institutions meant something different from what they mean to most people to-day. "Private property," to the Fathers, meant the ownership of some share in the means of production: for example, land on which something is grown, a shop in which something is made or marketed, a ship in which something is carried. Property in this real<sup>1</sup> sense was the common form of property

<sup>1</sup> "Real," that is, as opposed to the average man's attenuated ownership in modern corporate property.

which the Fathers saw about them. And since most holdings in property were still on a small scale, the American Fathers thought in terms of a country where the average family could look forward to owning something real.

It is for this reason that men like Washington and Adams and Madison defended property on moral grounds. It is for this reason they said it made for stability, for responsibility, for character, for freedom. They did not mean that if a million families watched one family owning something, the entire million would be filled with these high virtues. They meant that if the million families all owned a part of the means of production, the ownership, the privilege of doing creative work which the ownership conferred, would make for independence, self-reliance, industry, freedom, in the members of each family. To-day Americans are so accustomed to the mild nausea which comes when politicians, or members of the Liberty League, tell the landless, toolless poor that they are lucky to live in a country that has the institution of private property,—they are so accustomed to this that they are beginning to associate the phrase, private property, with the feeling, nausea. They are being conditioned, in other words, to get sick at the stomach at the mere mention of their heritage. This is a pity. They should remember that there was a time when these words were neither lies nor sentimentality. Remembering that, they might feel less hopeless about making them real to-day.

It is only by recalling what the Fathers meant by property that we can understand what they meant by self-government. In the first place, they did not mean the system that is called democracy to-day. They did not mean the vote for everybody. Because they had a high opinion of the effect of real property on the characters of its owners, and because they foresaw a nation in which

real property would be widely distributed, they felt that the vote should be restricted to property-holders. The case against giving the vote to men of no property was put by James Madison <sup>1</sup> in a reasonable form. He said that a country which encouraged industry and finance was bound to have a class of expropriated citizens. And he warned that if these men were given the vote they would not be able to win better conditions for themselves by means of the vote; they would merely become "the tools of opulence and ambition." The phrase, it seems to me, is an exact one, if it be applied to the expropriated voters in a modern American city—to the people, for example, who elected Mr. James Walker mayor of New York for the second time, or the people who kept the Vare machine in power in Philadelphia.

It was the conviction of the Fathers, therefore, that self-government went hand in hand with property. The expropriated man, they thought, had no power of resistance. Politically he might be a free man; but economically he was unfree. And the Fathers felt that if the vote, a political *form* of freedom, were given to people who did not have property, the economic *reality* of freedom, the result would be a lie. And with one exception the Fathers did not dare dream that the country would ever be able to provide all men with property.

The exception was Jefferson. Among the eight or ten greatest leaders of that day, he was the one who believed in complete political democracy. This does not mean that he differed from the other Fathers on the wisdom of having property (the reality of freedom) and the vote (the form of freedom) go hand in hand. Jefferson was in agreement here. But Jefferson thought all men should have the vote because he thought all men

<sup>1</sup> Member of the Constitutional Convention (1787); fourth President of the U.S.

should have real property.<sup>1</sup> He was wild enough, in other words, to imagine a nation of free men. And at the same time he was bold enough to believe that the one way to ensure such a nation was to discourage industry and commerce and finance. "Freedom," for Jefferson, did not merely mean the possession of abstract political rights. It meant, quite literally, independence. It meant the power to resist orders handed down from on high. It meant the power to thumb the nose at the man in brass buttons who brought such orders. Freedom of this utter sort can be approximated only in a simple agrarian world, in which largely self-supporting farms are supplemented by the skilled artisans of village communities, and in which luxuries (when permitted at all) are imported from abroad in exchange for surplus food. Just such a world as this was Jefferson's dream for America. Government was to do routine police work, to see that the country had a stable currency, and to look after the simple foreign relations of a nation that was nobody's trade rival. Beyond that, Government was to keep its hands off.

Jefferson, though averse to great riches, was not planning to build a nation of poor people. He knew at first hand the wealth and abundance of America's land. He knew it could provide a good standard of living and a high standard of education, of culture, and of all-round attainment. In recent years, in a vain effort to feel happy about the plight in which a century of progress has landed us, we have taught ourselves a big ridiculous lie about the splendour of our modern standard of living, and an equally ridiculous lie about the meagre life of our forefathers. It is important, therefore, to

<sup>1</sup> All white men, of course. Like most of the Southern leaders in his day, Jefferson opposed slavery. But he did not wish to free the negroes and leave them status-less among their former masters. He wished to colonize them in some other part of the world.



remember that the American land, used as Jefferson wished to use it, not only could but did supply a far more abundant life than anything known by the large majority of Americans at the peak of the late boom. Two quotations will make clear the grounds for this statement.

The first is from *The Open Door at Home*, by Mr. Charles A. Beard. Mr. Beard is a friend of "progress," of centralization, and of the machine. The Jeffersonian life does not satisfy him, and it is safe to say that he would not exaggerate its merits. Yet in pointing out that America has the natural resources to live comfortably without a large foreign trade, Mr. Beard writes :

A single citation taken from the historical records of a single family may be used to illustrate, if not establish, the proposition. This family came to America in colonial times. . . . By 1830 there were many descendants. All of them were farmers and artisans and owned homesteads of fair size. With agriculture they combined the crafts of ship and household. One of the men was a hatter, another was a tanner, a third was a smith and carriage-maker, a fourth was a wood- and metal-worker who made spinning-wheels, looms, barrels, furniture, and utensils, and a fifth was a distiller of brandy. The women of the household were equally versatile and skilled in the domestic arts—spinners, weavers, dyers, and conservers of foodstuffs; they made blankets, coverlets, sheets, rugs and clothing, using wool, cotton and flax, some of which, after the lapse of a century, are still in use.

Of foodstuffs this community of families produced wheat, rye, oats, and barley, chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys, pork, and beef, honey and sorghum molasses, cherries, peaches, plums, apples, raspberries, blackberries, and strawberries, potatoes, cabbage, peas, lettuce, onions, rhubarb, parsnips, turnips, melons, pumpkins and squashes, pure wines and brandy. Wool, cotton, and linen supplied clothing, carpets, and bedding. Fuel came from the forests. Houses, all good and substantial, were made of brick and wood, the materials for which came from the farms. The only articles which the community required for a high standard of physical life were wrought-iron, glass, and

salt, with tea and coffee as luxuries. Furniture, hats, tools, and implements were made in the farm shops. The community supported an academy, housed in a building made of brick and wood supplied from forest and field and erected by community labour. . . .

All branches of the family had books. In the middle years of the nineteenth century they received periodically the catalogues of booksellers from New York and Philadelphia and bought books with discrimination, if sparingly. The more intellectually alert among the family were acquainted with the main currents of thought then running through the Western world—religious, political, and scientific. None was rich; none was poor. No member of the community was ever uncertain as to possessing all the food, clothing, and shelter necessary for a comfortable life. All, men and women alike, were artisans, possessed of an artistic skill which found joyful expression.<sup>1</sup>

My second quotation consists of two grim sentences from *America's Capacity to Consume*, prepared by the Brookings Institution (which, again, will not be accused of exaggerating in favour of my present point): "At 1929 prices, a family income of \$2,000 may be regarded as sufficient to supply only basic necessities. However accurate this generalization may be, it is significant to note that more than sixteen million families, or practically 60 per cent. of the total number, were below this standard of expenditures."<sup>2</sup> At the height of industrial prosperity, under the *régime* of bigger and bigger business and more and more subdivision of labour, the American families who could not supply themselves with "basic necessities" were closer to two-thirds than to half of

<sup>1</sup> These conditions are, of course, far above what was found in a newly opened frontier settlement; but they are not unusual in the sections of the country where agrarian life had long been rooted. Cp. *The Salt-box House*, by Jane de Forest Shelton.

<sup>2</sup> The same book points out that in 1929 71 per cent. of America's families had incomes of less than \$2,500, and 41 per cent. had incomes of less than \$1,500.

the total number. The mind shies off from considering what the facts must have been three years later.

The tragedy of all this might be less unnerving were it not that when the present economic *régime* is attacked on moral or political grounds, many people consider it a defence to say that without this *régime* we could not have the American standard of living.<sup>1</sup>

The life pictured by Mr. Beard is the life Jefferson wanted for his country—a life in which “none was rich; none was poor”; a life in which the extreme of luxury and leisure would be sacrificed, and commerce and industry in any but the simplest forms would be discouraged. It is surprising to remember, to-day, just how far Jefferson was prepared to go in suppressing industry. He said that the proportion of other citizens to husbandmen in a state “is the proportion of its unsound to its healthy parts.” And he said, “I view great cities as pestilential to the morals, the health, and the liberties of man.” And again, “The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government as sores do to the strength of the human body.” In all this, Jefferson was typical of American Culture, which explains why his ideas have such a hold on our hearts. The hold is disproportionate to anything we have ever been willing to do (or anything Jefferson himself was ever willing to do) to make these ideas real.

When Jefferson went to Paris as American Minister in 1784, the new Culture stood face to face with the parent Culture that was just rigidifying into a Civilization. Toward the close of the eighteenth century Jefferson saw the beginning of one of the first world-cities of Western man. Quite properly, he disliked what he saw. Quite properly, his instincts told him that here was

<sup>1</sup> For figures on this standard of living, cp. Chapter Three, Section 2.

death.<sup>1</sup> Here was the beginning of an end, and Jefferson was half the son of the Virginia frontier, where life was the beginning of a beginning. But the other half of Jefferson was his Randolph mother: Tidewater Virginia, colonial America, a gracious new-world copy of an old-world Culture. Jefferson was popular in Paris. He could live in that world, too, though his heart was not with it. In all this, he was a symbol of America as she still is to-day: half colonial (which means half a delayed and somewhat inferior picture of life across the Atlantic), and half independent (half a new, autonomous response, in terms of Western man's religion and his inherited feelings, to a fresh start, to physical opportunities such as man may never before have been offered).

Jefferson's heart and mind were all for an independent America, all for the new Culture. He described the main terms of that Culture in language so appealing that he is still the inspiration of people who are moved by the American dream. But Jefferson's will, on some deeper level than his mind knew, must have been divided. That is the kindest explanation of why, when the chance for action came to him, he betrayed the America of his dream.

Before recalling the story of that betrayal, I will describe the two social programmes for young America that were put forward to oppose Jefferson: the programmes of John Adams and Hamilton.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Again, I do not mean that Europe is necessarily dying, in the sense that it is over and done with. I mean that from the standpoint of a young Culture trying to become something new, Europe was already dead. It was dead because it was rigidified. Its inner possibilities, its feelings about the meaning of life, were all expressed. Further developments would be variations on the theme. Such as it was, it was complete. And such as it was, to the young American mind it was not good enough.

<sup>2</sup> When Jefferson succeeded John Adams in the Presidency in 1801 there were about five and a half million people in the United States. The centre of population was still only eighteen miles west of Baltimore,

Adams was a cold, cranky New Englander; but he was a realist. He could never, like Jefferson, persuade himself that he had brought a social system to life merely by describing it attractively. Jefferson was the genius who could put into words the hopes and ideals that were vaguely stirring among the mass of the American people. For this America has honoured him and kept him in affection to the present day. She has not held it against him that he did nothing to bring these hopes to life, that in truth he did a great deal to discredit them. Perhaps the reason she has not held it against him is that it has been one of America's national traits to prefer, like Jefferson, the word to the fact. But John Adams, even in building his political theories, kept an eye on the fact. As a result, his vision of the future of America was less pretty than Jefferson's, but more possible.

Looking about him, Adams knew that America was no longer a purely agrarian state. He knew that commerce and industry and high finance were already features of American life. Jefferson had seemed to feel that by pointing out the evils of great cities and great accumulations of wealth he had done his duty, that thenceforth no such things would dare exist. Adams was less hopeful. Though of farming stock himself, he knew the great commercial families of Boston, and it seemed to him that they would not be discouraged by harsh words. So he admitted that America was not, and never would

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a seaboard city. Excluding slaves, more than 80 per cent. of the adult males were owners of real property, of their own means of livelihood. About 75 per cent. of these people were independent farmers. Yet the centralizing effects of finance were already felt, and led to the popular revolt which resulted in the election of Jefferson, who was pledged to fight the money-power. At the time this election was called "the Revolution of 1800." I try to suggest below why it did not turn out to be a revolution.

be, the Arcadia that Jefferson described. His plan was to try to preserve the existing wide distribution of property by preventing private enterprise from collecting too much of the means of production into too few hands. He saw the obvious truth that any society where industry and finance are encouraged will divide into rich and poor—and this seemed to him no evil. But he also saw the obvious truth that freedom dies in a society where this division is allowed to go to its logical conclusion, where there are a few rich men who own almost everything and a great many poor men who own almost nothing—and this he was resolved to prevent. He saw that in order to prevent it the state must do a great deal more governing than Jefferson thought necessary. The state, while allowing enterprise to win the reward of relative riches, must safeguard the small man against the great in order to keep the economic basis for freedom and self-government. Lastly, Adams felt that those Americans who owned no property should not have the vote. He wanted property to be widely distributed; but he was convinced that expropriated men were not genuinely free and that it would be a subterfuge to give them the form of political power.

“Power always follows property,” Adams wrote. “This I believe to be as infallible a maxim in politics, as that action and reaction are equal, is in mechanics.” It was Adams’s theory that large property would find its natural representation in the Senate, small property in the House of Representatives. It was this balance which was to keep the rich from overturning the state—for Adams was too realistic to suppose that the men who had won the most property would be the men who were the most unselfish or the most disinterested. He feared the aggression of the rich quite as much as he feared the irresponsibility of the men who had no property. He planned a republic with a ruling class to be recruited

from among the comparatively disinterested men of middling fortune, men who had not been made rapacious by great wealth, nor flighty by expropriation.

This is a less stirring system than Jefferson's. For one thing, it lacks universality. Jefferson and Adams agreed on the principle that only economic freedom, which means ownership, can support liberty or self-government or equality. Jefferson thereupon dreamed a perfect state in which all men were owners, and put his dream in words that have made a permanent mark on the American mind. Adams, made sombre by grey New England winters, saw that all men could not be owners, but that many men could, at least in this new country. So he made a plan to fit the real world—a plan, therefore, of second bests—and offered it to the people. The people were not pleased. Adams would not promise them that the world was a friendly, gentle place. Adams would not flatter them about the vote. Yet Adams, had he been politician enough to win himself a hearing, was prepared to build a state on moral principles. He was prepared to find an acceptable middle ground between the agrarian paradise of Jefferson's fancy (a paradise that not even Jefferson, in the end, was willing to fight for), and the harsh alien worldliness of Hamilton's plan. He was prepared to make real the American dream—or as much of it as he thought could be translated into the world of fact. But the majority preferred, with Jefferson, to keep the dream unspoiled even if that meant keeping it unrealized. And the minority preferred, with Hamilton, to

take the cash and let the credit go,  
Nor heed the rumble of a distant drum.

The drum was very distant in the 1790's. It is loud in men's ears to-day.

Hamilton had one of the greatest practical minds in

history. In the field of money and banking he had a superb clarity. He seems to have been the first statesman (perhaps the first financier), to understand in detail not only the mechanism but the implications of the new system of banking which had grown up in England during the eighteenth century. A recent historian of monetary theory says that "in his effort to provide the United States with a sound banking and money system, Hamilton antedated Sir Robert Peel by fifty years." The chaos of early American thought and practice in regard to money makes Hamilton's abilities seem all the more amazing. In his *Report on a National Bank*, in 1790, Hamilton pointed out that banks could, and did, put a great deal more money into circulation than they had on hand in the form of cash. He reminded the public (as an ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer found it necessary to remind the British public only the other day) that every bank-loan creates a deposit, a book credit, which is normally transferred to other creditors by cheque or draft, circulating and serving as money until someone uses it to cancel a loan to a bank. In other words, Hamilton made it clear that, in a country with a banking system on the new British model, when a man raises a bank-loan against a piece of real estate as collateral, or against a warehouse full of wheat, the credit which the bank advances him at once becomes a part of the nation's money, remaining part of the nation's money until the loan is extinguished. The power to make such loans, as Hamilton realized, is quite as important as the power to issue paper money. When the British Parliament, in 1844, passed the famous Act which practically limited the issue of paper money to a one-to-one ratio with the supply of gold, John Stuart Mill attacked both the Government and the Opposition for the "incredible blunder" of thinking that bank-notes are a form of currency distinct from bank credit, and that the undue



expansion of the currency could be prevented by curbing note-issue alone.

As early as 1790, however, Hamilton was quite clear in his mind on this question which still befuddled the British Parliament in 1844. He understood what had been happening in England, and what was going to happen. And he saw what a "sound banking system" (that is, a system using these colossal powers with reasonable caution, so as not to lose public confidence) could do for American business. Not only could it provide a currency which would expand or contract according to the need of industry, and which would be far more stable than the paper money which was then distracting business, but a sound banking system would also be a great centralizing monopoly, gathering more and more of the nation's wealth into fewer and fewer hands, and thus making possible capital expenditures on a scale that the Jefferson-state of small owners (or even the Adams-state of moderately rich men and moderately poor) could never attain. Hamilton, with his usual clairvoyance, foresaw what industrialism would do to the nineteenth century, both in the way of increasing wealth and population and in the way of increasing destitution and human exploitation. He not only foresaw it, but he approved.

Perhaps the most refreshing thing about Hamilton was the corrosive honesty of his mind. He had a cruel policy, and he offered it to his country in cruel terms, leaving it to his weak imitators to pretend that it was all done for "service." Hamilton worshipped bigness, power, success. And, like most men addicted to such worship, Hamilton despised the common people. He never stooped, therefore, to making frail apologies for exploitation. He did not excuse exploitation, he recommended it. He described it in its most unholy forms, and said it was exactly what a great nation needed. It was the quickest way to wealth and power; therefore,

it was good. Hamilton's defence of the factory system contains one of the most remarkable passages in literature :

Besides this advantage of occasional employment to classes having different occupations [he wrote] there is another, of a nature allied to it, and of a similar tendency. This is the employment of persons who would otherwise be idle, and in many cases a burthen on the community, either from bias of temper, habit, infirmity of body, or some other cause, indisposing or disqualifying them for the toils of the country. It is worthy of particular remark that, in general, women and children are rendered more useful, and the latter more early useful, by manufacturing establishments, than they would otherwise be. Of the number of persons employed in the cotton manufactories of Great Britain, it is computed that four-sevenths, nearly, are women and children; of whom the greatest proportion are children, and many of them of a tender age.

Hamilton, I think, is the only one of the great founders of the United States who, had he been shown a vision of America in 1928, would not have hidden his eyes for pity. Jefferson, with eighteenth-century sensibility, might have swooned at the sight. Madison would have been less surprised but just as little pleased. Washington, with his vision of a fawning empire led by a class of great landowners, would have wished he had stayed at home in Mount Vernon to tend his gardens. John Adams would have tried to deny his pain with a bitter jibe at human nature. But Hamilton would have smiled, and said, "Yes. This is what I planned. Isn't it rich? Isn't it big? Isn't it powerful?" Had anyone told him that almost 60 per cent. of the families could not buy basic necessities, he would have said, "Of course. The people is always poor. The people, sir, is a great beast!" Had anyone shown him the textile mills of Patterson or the coal-mines of West Virginia, he would have approved, on the whole, though here and there he would have found traces of humanitarianism to condemn. And from time to time he

would certainly cry out, "What's this? A manufactory where there are no children at all? Are the little ones to be a burthen on the community when they might just as well be making cotton?"

If the test of statesmanship is the degree of influence on the course of events, Hamilton was a great statesman. He was determined that America should copy the new economy of England, since that way lay the quickest rise to riches—riches, for Hamilton, meaning a plutocratic class, for he would have thought that Jefferson's nation of small owners was doomed to a mean poverty.

Hamilton had an odd trick of talking about "the rich and well born," as if he felt the two ideas went naturally together—a trick which forms a constant reminder that Hamilton himself was a fatherless upstart. For riches, to Hamilton, meant pieces of paper; and had he been more familiar with the world in which he played so shining a part he would have been less hopeful about the parentage of paper-plutocrats. And there is something suggestive of the upstart, again, in Hamilton's excessive colonialism, his keen desire that America should quickly learn to play Europe's game, especially England's game, and play it more shrewdly than the parent. That America might have a game of her own, might if she took time develop a way of life other than that which "the rich and well born" were importing from Europe, seemed simple nonsense to Hamilton. Compared to a man like Jefferson, Hamilton was a mere colonial. Jefferson saw America as a chance to make a fresh start in the Western world, to develop something nearer to the heart's desire. Hamilton saw America as a chance to do the same old thing on an unusually lavish scale.

Hamilton, therefore, did not want to leave property widely distributed. He wanted to collect it in the hands

of a small class, where it could be used for huge ambitious schemes. In economics, he wanted America to be an oligarchy, and he was too wise to suggest a government in which the political form differed from the economic fact. His politics were quite simply to promote the monied interest, and then to let that interest run the country—for he assumed that all the real talent and wealth in the nation would come to the top in the scramble for money.<sup>1</sup>

Hamilton at first urged a monarchy on the Constitutional Convention. His plan was for an executive strong enough to make the country safe for bankers. When that was turned down, he asked the Convention at least to give the rich every possible protection. "All communities," he said, "divide themselves into the few and the many. The first are the rich and well born, the other the mass of the people. . . . The people are turbulent and changing; they seldom judge or determine right. Give, therefore, to the first class a distinct, permanent share in the government. They will check the unsteadiness of the second; and as they cannot receive any advantage by a change, they therefore will ever maintain good government."

The last sentence does not do justice to Hamilton's

<sup>1</sup> "Capitalism" is usually taken to mean the system of the private ownership of the means of production, the use of the means of production for the sake of profit, and the distribution of the products by means of money and the price system. In this sense, Jefferson and Adams on the one side, and Hamilton on the other, all believed in capitalism. But "private ownership of the means of production" can mean two things. It can mean, as it did to Jefferson and Adams, that such ownership will be the normal state of man; or it can mean, as it did to Hamilton, that ownership will be so very private that scarcely anyone has any. Capitalism in the first form goes hand in hand with self-government; capitalism in the second form goes hand in hand with plutocracy. Capitalism in the first form is what America set out to create; capitalism in the second form was perfected by Great Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

mind. Apparently it could not work with its usual bitter clarity on the subject of "the rich and well born." Jefferson has been laughed at, rightly enough, for thinking that the voice of the people could be trusted; but Jefferson can at least be defended on the ground that he thought of "the people" in terms of land-owning free farmers and tool-owning free artisans—just the sort of people who *can* be trusted to run their own affairs. But what can be said for Hamilton's thesis that the rich, if put in power, will not be moved by greed or jealousy? Jefferson's comment is sufficient: "I have never," he said, "observed men's honesty to increase with their riches."

Here again John Adams's plan was better fitted to reconcile ideals and realities than that of either of his opponents. Jefferson's plan would have been justified if America were the free nation that he dreamed. But America wasn't, and Jefferson was doing nothing to make her so. His plan, therefore, became outmoded. Hamilton's plan included the lunatic thesis that a country governed by its rich would be a country justly governed. Perhaps Hamilton knew the folly of this; perhaps he did not care a fig whether the country was justly governed or not, so long as it constantly grew richer, bigger, and more gaudy. When Hamilton spoke before the Constitutional Convention, he may have felt, for once, that he had better hide his contempt for humanity. But John Adams's view really took account of the facts. He did not trust Hamilton's "rich and well born," for obvious reasons. He could not agree with Jefferson's sweeping claims for "the people," because he knew how many of the people had already become expropriated city-dwellers—the raw material for the mobs which Jefferson, in another mood, said were as useful to a nation as sores were to a human body. So Adams put his trust in the middle group of property-

owners—the moderately rich and moderately poor. Instead of toadying to the plutocrats, he thought they should be discouraged and their power curbed. He thought America could grow into a nation where the middle group was an overwhelming majority, and that such a nation could be for the most part self-governing, and for the most part composed of free men.

“For the most part,” however, is not a fighting cry. Hamilton offered absolute riches and glory. Jefferson offered absolute justice and equality. The nation took sides, lining up behind these men. Adams was neglected.

Power was fairly evenly divided between the two sides as the critical year, 1800,<sup>1</sup> drew near. Each had their share of the country's best brains. Each had their share of wealth. But the wealth of Jefferson's followers was chiefly agrarian, which meant that it could not be so easily mobilized or so efficiently directed as the paper wealth of the Hamiltonians. To offset this, Jefferson had by far the greater numbers. Many of his followers, to be sure, did not have the vote; but there were enough of them who did have the vote to insure the party's success; so in the year 1800 Jefferson was elected President. He had his chance to undo the centralizing work of the Federalists, to undo all Hamilton's efforts to create a money power. He had his chance to build a legal bulwark protecting the man of little property, discouraging the concentration of ownership in a few hands. Jefferson had his chance; but he did exactly nothing. The reasons for his inaction are so obscure, the inaction itself so puzzling, that every possible explanation has been advanced, including bribery.

<sup>1</sup> The year in which Jefferson, the supposedly revolutionary democrat, defeated John Adams for the Presidency.

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Hamilton had predicted that Jefferson would not be half so dangerous as he sounded. "He is as likely," wrote Hamilton, "as any man I know to temporize—to calculate what will be likely to promote his own reputation and advantage; and the probable result of such a temper is the preservation of systems, though originally opposed, which, being once established, could not be overturned without danger to the person that did it."

It seems that Hamilton was right, that when it came to an open attack on the centralized financial system which Hamilton had set up during his years as Secretary of the Treasury, Jefferson temporized. His will, as I have suggested, was probably divided. So he decided there was no hurry, that since the friends of the people were now in power, the Hamiltonian system could be allowed to lapse quietly over a period of years.

And when it came to doing anything positive, in the way of setting up institutions to protect and preserve small property against the encroachments of finance and of the unfolding industrial revolution, Jefferson was inhibited by his own principle that a government should be as inactive as possible. This was a poor principle with which to fight the most dynamic forces in Western history, forces which had just begun to invade America from Britain and which Hamilton had been welcoming with open arms: finance capitalism,<sup>1</sup> and the form of the industrial revolution which finance capitalism entails. By clinging, in the face of this invasion, to the doctrine of the least possible government, Jefferson gave away the game. And he gave it away at a moment when the balance of power was still on his side, when he could have directed the industrial revolution into channels

<sup>1</sup> By "finance capitalism" I mean the second, the Hamiltonian, form of "the system of the private ownership of the means of production."

which need not have been alien to his own plans for America.

The industrial revolution merely provided tools for increasing America's wealth in goods and services. Real ownership of the new industrial tools could have been widely distributed, but at the cost of slower development. The people as a whole would not have protested at the slower development, had they been shown how much they as individuals gained thereby.

In order to seize his chance and defend the cause he stood for, Jefferson would have had to understand the new financial and industrial developments as clearly as did Hamilton. He would have had to be as ruthless as Hamilton in using the power that was in his hands to weaken opposition. This was asking too much of Jefferson. He could state the dream, in language that stirred the American heart. This gave him such a hold on the public that he could be elected to any office he chose, at any time. But once in power he was not the man to fight for the basic institutions that would make the dream come true. His mind did not cut clean to the root of things, as did the mind of his enemy.

And yet, it is possible that Jefferson will have the longest influence in the end. Hamilton built well. Slowly, his followers became the stronger; and in time they proved their superior power through four years of civil war. Since then, they have had seventy years to justify their view of life to the American people. Travel through America to-day, and you will be surprised how little they have succeeded. And their failure is not being discussed, over most of the country, in terms of the alien ideals of Marx.

As the Hamiltonian plutocracy grows steadily more ruinous to agriculture men are not saying, up and down the Mississippi Valley, that what America needs is the collective farm of Russia. They are talking in terms



that recall the words of Jefferson: "Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever He had a chosen people. . . . Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example. It is the mark set on those who, not looking up to heaven, to their own soil and industry, as does the husbandman, for their subsistence, depend for it on casualties and caprice of customers. Dependence begets subservience and venality."

As the Hamiltonian plutocracy grows steadily more burdensome, its rules more vexing, its hand heavier, the American public is not thinking that what it really want is a Marxian state to manage everything. In spite of all it has been told about the need for ever greater complication, it is remembering with a half-shamed hope that Jefferson once promised "a wise and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, which shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labour the bread it has earned."

As the Hamiltonian plutocracy moves toward the absolutism that its creator planned for it in the beginning, as more and more is heard of the need for a strong man to save America, the people are not talking about fighting a financial dictatorship with a dictatorship of the proletariat; they are talking in terms of Jefferson's central statement: "I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man."

Jefferson was a muddled administrator, a weak fighter in the world of economic forces. He relied too much on the fact that the people were with him and that the people were numerous. He did not understand that if he let even a small group of enemies collect the real power in their hands, they were bound to prevail. But

what he did understand was the desire in the heart of the American people. He did little, in the end, to keep that desire from being frustrated ; but he did one thing : he gave it form in words and in his own example. In the end, that may prove to have been enough. Hamilton was a brilliant, effective man who saw where the power lay and who made use of it. But Hamilton may yet be shown to have backed the wrong horse. He undertook to make America a copy of industrial England, with all the inequity which he saw so clearly must accompany his much-loved finance-capitalism. His followers have at last carried out the work that he began. They have turned the American economy into a bad imitation of Great Britain's.<sup>1</sup> But it is not yet certain that the American public is satisfied. The American public has begun to remember an old dream, and it may suddenly ask what has been done with America. If it does, Jefferson will have helped more than any other man to make that question possible.

<sup>1</sup> An economy which has depopulated the British land and proletarianized the British worker.

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## CHAPTER TWO

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### I

For a good many years after the election of 1800, there seemed to be a truce between the two powers. The Jeffersonians controlled the government, and although they did not encourage centralizing finance and the centralizing factory system, they did nothing effective to discourage them. (And indirectly, of course, via the embargo, they did a great deal to build up industry.) So while the Jeffersonians sat in Washington, the Hamiltonians were getting rich. They could afford to bide their time. The next crisis came in the 1820's, during the Presidency of John Quincy Adams. The Jeffersonians won another seeming victory. This time it was nearly fatal to their cause.

By 1828 the industrial revolution was well under way. It had given the death-blow to authentic "Jeffersonian democracy"—that is, to an agrarian state in which true social democracy prevailed and in which all men had the vote because all men owned a share in the means of production. The man who wrote that "the mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government as sores do to the strength of the human body," would not have called modern Chicago a "democracy." His picture of democracy was the social and political life of Piedmont Virginia. And by 1828 it was clear that such life had disappeared for a long time over much of America, and was doomed to disappear over still more. But just as "Jeffersonian democracy" grew to have less and less meaning, it

became more and more popular. This was the result, in large part, of the rapid settling of the West. In the new frontier states there was a wide distribution of property. Hence there was real social democracy, real equality. Quite properly, therefore, unrestricted democracy seemed, in these states, the best form of government. Almost all the new states, as they were admitted to the Union, chose constitutions giving the vote to adult males. An agitation for similar privileges spread to the East.<sup>1</sup> But in the East the basis for democracy no longer existed. The men who were asking for the vote were not free men. They were economically unfree, and destined to grow steadily more servile.

Two movements were coming to a head in the United States at the same time. The first was the triumph of political democracy; the second was the triumph of private enterprise over private property, the triumph of centralizing finance-capitalism over the older American conception of a society in which most men had some property and no men had gross accumulations of it. In other words, there was preparing a hideous combination of the Jeffersonian and Hamiltonian plans. Hamilton had offered an economic oligarchy and a political oligarchy to go with it. Jefferson had offered an economic democracy and a political democracy to go with it. Now America was preparing to take Hamilton's economic oligarchy and marry it to Jefferson's political democracy, producing a combination that nobody had ever even pretended would be good.

The chief point in favour of the Hamiltonian state is its efficiency. Concentrate ownership, concentrate economic and political control, and you can get a great deal done. What you do may be disgusting, but your

<sup>1</sup> The movement toward a broader suffrage had, of course, begun in the East, in Pennsylvania. But the influence of the new West accelerated this movement notably.

methods will be brisk and businesslike. The chief point in favour of the Jeffersonian state is that it breeds free men. No one denies that democracy is inefficient; but it seems the natural political form for a free society, so free men put up with its sloppiness, its wastefulness in time and effort. But combine Hamilton's economics with Jefferson's politics and you get none of these benefits. You do not have a nation of free men; you do not have an efficiently governed nation. You do not have anything that any statesman or philosopher has ever recommended to mankind. What you do have is the worst features of American life from President Grant to President Hoover.

John Quincy Adams, as his father's heir, tried to save America from this miserable combination. He tried again to interest the American nation in the Adams plan. Admitting that America could not be a complete democracy, because her economic organization did not permit that all men should own property, Adams insisted that she could have a very large measure of self-government. To insure self-government, however, she would have to put a curb on private enterprise, to see to it that the rich were not allowed to go on growing richer without end, at the expense of the property of their fellow-countrymen.

Further, John Quincy Adams hoped to make self-government and freedom real things in America by turning the opening of the West into a plan for national welfare instead of a game for gamblers. He wished the government to make improvements in the way of roads and canals, and then to sell off the national domain slowly when a real pressure of population had developed and a modest price could be had for the land. With the money thus raised, he wished to endow a system of free education such as no nation had previously dreamed. In other words, while his enemy, Jackson, talked thoughtless rant about "democracy"—by which he meant giving all men the vote and making periodic planless attacks on

Eastern wealth—Adams had a programme which might have led to true democracy, to a nation of instructed people, all of whom had a chance because they could all get thorough education at the state's expense, and to a nation of independent people most of whom had a chance at real ownership.

Adams fought for this dream all his life; but he was in the same hopeless position his father had been in: he was so realistic and so honest that all he could bring himself to offer was a plan which would "for the most part" implement the American dream. The people would have none of such caution. Although Adams had a vision of the country's future greatness and a proud patriotism recalling Washington himself, the people turned from him to Jackson, to the cheap and easy *forms* of democracy—the vote, and the politician's handshake and the backwoods manner. Jackson had promised that the people should govern, that the people should have equity. But Jackson knew even less than Jefferson about the economic realities behind the scenes. He could attack the Bank, and win a famous victory; but the result was a long depression during which the poor man's property was sifting steadily into the control of the rich. The factory system, with its few owners and its many "hands," was growing. America was breeding a proletarian class—a class of toolless, landless "asphalt flowers." Finance was centralizing in New York and Philadelphia. The whole basis of democracy was rotting. The country was being prepared for the era of the "robber barons." But Jackson was a democratic hero because he spoke the people fair and let men bring their muddy boots into the White House.

The "Jacksonian Revolution" was a hoax.<sup>1</sup> Under

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Jackson was President of the United States from 1829 to 1837. As in the case of Jefferson, his election was hailed at the time as a "revolution." Jackson promised to break the money-power and make

its influence America got adult manhood suffrage (the form of freedom) without a single step being taken to preserve widely distributed property (the reality of freedom).<sup>1</sup> For a generation following this "revolution" the real shift in power that was taking place over most of the country was disregarded. And the change in the working, even if not in the name, of political institutions—a change that must accompany such a shift in power—was even more carefully ignored. The attack on the Bank, the Mexican War, the huge land-booty that resulted, the new acute stage of the slavery issue leading to the Compromise of 1850—such issues seemed to be the important content of American history. And the fiction that the basic institutions of private property and self-government were still intact was made more plausible by the fact that the ever-new West still kept economic freedom, and hence real democracy. But the important facts of the period between Jackson and the Civil War were that Northern manufactures were increasing by as much as 95 per cent. in a single decade, that the factory system was creeping West through Ohio into Indiana, that two-thirds of the banking capital of the country had collected in the North-east, that labour troubles on a European model were beginning, that the population of New York City<sup>2</sup> grew from a little over two hundred thousand to a little over a million.

Jefferson had written, "I think our governments will remain virtuous . . . as long as they are chiefly agricultural; and this will be as long as there shall be vacant

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democracy real. His sincere but awkward attacks on the money-power led to a financial panic as a result of which property concentrated into fewer hands and the poor grew poorer. The "Jackson period" saw the spread of political democracy and the beginnings of real plutocracy.

<sup>1</sup> America also got a political alignment between West and South, enabling these sections to run the country. This was no hoax, but the promises it was built on were.

<sup>2</sup> Counting the two boroughs of Manhattan and Brooklyn.

lands in any part of America. When they get piled upon one another in large cities, as in Europe, they will become corrupt as in Europe." There was still enough vacant land in America to swallow France several times over. But already people were getting "piled upon one another in large cities, as in Europe." And soon their corruption, in government at least, would be so complete that they could give lessons to the old world. Van Buren, the "red fox" of New York politics, had already gone to Washington to teach the innocent western democrats how to run a mob.<sup>1</sup>

## 2

The meaning of all this was that the evils which were bound to follow on America's choice of private enterprise, rather than private property, were just beginning to show. Unbridled private enterprise must, in an era of finance capitalism, destroy a system of real private property. It must lead to more and more centralized control over the means of production, until the time comes when real property has ceased being an institution of society and has become a museum piece. And when that time comes, real self-government will be found to have died along with real property; for political freedom without economic freedom is a fake. Hamilton had foreseen this development; but Hamilton was an oligarch, so the prospect pleased him. The two Adamses had foreseen it, and in the name of freedom had fought it all their lives; but the fight had gone against them. Jefferson had known and stated clearly that the growth of a proletariat, a propertyless city-mob, would be fatal to American institutions. But he had never been explicit as to why it would be fatal, as to exactly what was

<sup>1</sup> Van Buren became President of the United States in 1837, succeeding Jackson. He had already, in New York State, perfected the first thoroughly efficient political machine based on the "spoils system."



wrong with the city mob which made it a danger to American life. So Jefferson, though sounding eloquent warnings, never took action to prevent the thing he feared.

In the generation that followed these three men, American leaders seemed content to ignore the economic reality and to give all their attention to the political form. They seemed content to believe that America must be a democracy so long as more and more people had the vote. Unlike the realistic Fathers, they seemed unwilling to draw lessons from Roman history. In the face of the explicit warnings of the men who had made America, the leaders in the Middle Period did just the wrong thing about property and just the wrong thing about the vote. Instead of seeking a real democracy by extending ownership as widely as possible, and with it the vote, they allowed property to collect in fewer and fewer hands, and to the expropriated they sold the vote as a kind of sop. It is no wonder that millions of the expropriated sold their votes back again for something that was more fun to use.

Of course, there are people who think that America to-day is a nation of property-owners. For example, Dr. Virgil Jordan, the President of the National Industrial Conference Board, made a speech in the summer of 1934<sup>1</sup> in which he said, "There is not the slightest basis of ascertained fact to justify the statements constantly made by public officials these days to the effect that 2 per cent. or some such small proportion of the people own 80 per cent. or some such enormous part of the national wealth." To back up this statement, Dr. Jordan quoted such statistics as the following: "In 1930, fourteen million families, or half the families in the country, owned their own homes. More than

<sup>1</sup> My quotations are taken from a reprint of the speech in the *Chicago Tribune*.

half of all the farmers owned their farms. There was an automobile for four out of five families. Two out of three families had telephones and electricity, and 40 per cent. had radios."

These statements sound more impressive than they really are. In the first place, Dr. Jordan includes among his "owners" a great many people who owned nothing more permanent than a debt. In the second place, among all the people mentioned in this quotation, only the farmers own anything real—that is, a share in the means of production. You cannot produce wealth with a radio set. You do not become free and independent by paying every month for an electric light. If any man who has made a part payment on a mechanical gadget is to be called an "owner," then we might as well say that everyone in America has private property because everyone in America has a hat. On such a showing, Soviet Russia is also based on the institution of private property.

The truth is, of course, that private property as it was understood by the founders of America meant property in the means of production. If James Madison had been asked whether a man ought to be allowed to qualify as a voter because he had bartered his future earnings against a mechanical ice-box, the answer might not have been polite.

Mr. Jordan, however, has something to say about ownership in real property other than farms. "The ownership," he told his audience, "of the few very large corporations is widely spread among many small stockholders. The hundred and fifty-one leading corporations in the United States at the beginning of this year were owned by nearly ten million people." This is true, but again it is irrelevant. Ownership of an infinitesimally small share in some huge concern such as General Motors or United States Steel is not owner-

ship in the real sense of the word. It is essential that anyone who hopes to understand the political and economic crisis which the United States are facing to-day should grasp this fact.

If I own a farm or a machine-shop or a cross-roads store or a Gloucester fishing-boat, I have both responsibility and control. My success or failure will depend in large part on my ability, my character, and my reputation among my neighbours. In bad times I can at least make a fight to save myself. I may lose the fight, but in any case I am not quite helplessly subject to the whims of anonymous finance. That is the sort of ownership which has a moral effect on the owner. That is the sort of private property which can be defended on moral grounds. But if I own ten shares of New York Central stock, I have no control, no responsibility; there is no moral element in such ownership; I might just as well own a lottery ticket. If my luck is good, I make money; if my luck is bad, I don't. In neither case does it make any difference whether I am a good man or a knave, an industrious man or a lout.

Certain enterprises in the modern world (and they are not so numerous as many people think) have to be on so huge a scale that either widely diffused corporate ownership or state ownership is indicated. But we warp our minds and make our basic problems insoluble if we confuse real ownership, the form of private property which makes freedom and self-government possible, with this attenuated, irresponsible, lottery-ticket type of ownership. "Property," in other words, is used in three different senses. It is used to mean personal possessions, such as radios and hats; it is used to mean lottery-tickets, such as my hypothetical ten shares of New York Central stock; it is used to mean responsible ownership of some part of the means of production. It is only in the last sense that private property makes for

independence, makes for character, makes for the free society that America set out to be. And in this last sense, this real sense, private property is disappearing from American life—or rather, it is becoming the special privilege of that 2 per cent. of our population to which Mr. Jordan's "public officials" refer. There may be ten million "owners" of our hundred and fifty-one leading corporations; but it is doubtful if a thousand of these owners have real control.

## 3

The ironic figure of Lincoln shows American democracy, unaware of what is hindering it, struggling to save itself from an enemy it cannot see. Since Jefferson there had been no great American leader who was so whole-souled and simple a democrat as Lincoln. His devotion to the Union was based in large part on this fact. As a Middle Westerner Lincoln would in any case have been a Union man, for the Middle West could not afford, financially, to have the lower Mississippi Valley pass into foreign hands. But there was more than regional selfishness to Lincoln's feeling for the Union. There was his belief that if the country should divide in two the great democratic experiment would have failed. That the experiment might fail as a result of turning the country over to Northern business did not occur to him.

Lincoln, though he lived late enough to see that America was destined to be thoroughly industrialized, still thought of commerce in terms of the cross-roads store or of the little branch-line railway that served a score of villages. He still thought of industry in terms of the factory in a country town, owned and administered by one man or by a small group of men. He still thought of finance in terms of the little local bank, and of agriculture in terms of a free farmer subsisting largely off his

own land. In all this there is nothing discordant with democracy on a Jeffersonian scale. So Lincoln thought that in winning the war and saving the Union he was saving the American dream at the same time.

It is an ironic fact that the great democrat should have worked with such dedication and such tireless resource to win a war the result of which was to put America in the hands of Big Business and Big Finance, to prepare the way for a Hamiltonian plutocracy which might have extinguished the American dream for ever had not the plutocrats failed with startling completeness to make their economic order work.

The war killed the Southern attempt to create a slave-based democracy ruled of its own choice by a well-trained leisure class. The war killed the Middle Western attempt at a true social and economic democracy. These ideals were both agrarian, and the war proved that power had shifted from the land to the factory and the bank. For the time being, at least, what the land wanted did not matter. A new group was now prepared to pay the piper, and the tune it called was perhaps the most bizarre in modern history.

The new group has been needlessly dignified in American legend by the title of the Robber Barons. The name is too glamorous for this band of men who proved what unchecked private enterprise can do by appropriating a good part of the United States during the forty years following the Civil War.<sup>1</sup> The name has been given them on the false theory that they were in no large way to blame for what happened, that they were

<sup>1</sup> If any reader should find the remarks that follow impolite or exaggerated, I refer him to the following books, which I believe will show that I have understated the case against these men: Gustavus Myers, *The History of Great American Fortunes*; Matthew Josephson, *The Robber Barons*; Lewis Corey, *The House of Morgan*; J. T. Flynn, *God's Gold: John D. Rockefeller and his Times*; Bouck White, *The Book of Daniel Drew*.

economically determined, performing a useful service even if they performed it venally, that in any case the whole process of which they were a part was inevitable and therefore not a proper subject for moral comment. It is important to realize, now that the time has come to undo their work, that if judged by any moral standard known to Christendom these men were not glamorous, that so far from doing a useful job, they have prevented America for seventy years from getting the best out of the industrial revolution, and that they were no more "inevitable" than a filth disease. They were the kind of thing that happens when society is careless.

The name, robber baron, suggests physical courage, a personal recklessness which may accompany the meanest deeds, but which in itself is pleasant. And the name suggests that the barons were up to the old game of grabbing property by force. Neither suggestion is accurate. It was a new game these men were playing—the game of grabbing property by safe and secret force. There is a difference between the man who steals at the risk of getting an arrow through his throat and the man who steals at the risk of having a writ issued against him by a judge whom he knows he can buy. The prerequisites for this new game are exhaustless greed, and lack of scruple; given that, the game is no more dangerous than stealing pennies off a dead man's eyes.

In fact, the theme of physical cowardice runs through the story of these robber barons. All but one or two were young men at the time of the Civil War—the war fought to give them their chance to spoil their country. Yet they all stayed modestly in the background, content to sell the Government leaky boats or worthless rifles, or to advance it a little of its own credit at a good rate of interest. One of the younger Mellons thought of enlisting; but his father, Judge Thomas Mellon, wrote the boy as follows: "I had hoped my boy was going to

make a smart, intelligent business man and was not such a goose as to be seduced from duty by the declamations of buncombed speeches. It is only greenhorns who enlist. You can learn nothing in the army. . . . All now stay if they can and go if they must. Those who are able to pay for substitutes, do so, and no dishonour attaches." From Jay Gould (who, on being threatened by an angry victim, broke down so far as to give the man \$25,000 of the man's own money), to Mr. Insull, a "baron" whom we have all watched skulking through the Balkans and the Levant, it seems to be agreed in high financial circles that to cowardice "no discredit attaches." No wonder Charles Francis Adams, Jr., who spent twenty-five years in the railway business and knew these men well, wrote in his autobiography: "Not one (of the great figures of finance) that I have ever known would I care to meet again either in this world or the next; nor is one associated in my mind with the idea of humour, thought, or refinement."

Among all our boring plutocrats, perhaps the only one who stirs a shadow of sympathy is the unspeakable Jim Fisk, who at least had room in his wild nature for other vices than avarice. "Nothing is lost save honour," he commented after a slight defeat in the Erie war—and the phrase smells fresh, coming from that sty of hypocrites.

It may be thought that in spite of being mean of spirit and timorous of body, these men had some high power of mind that made it possible for them to grab such very large parcels of property. To a slight extent that is true of the financiers who got most of the property in the end; it is not true in the least of the barons who seized the property in the first place. The grabbing was all too easy, for anyone endowed with industry, concentration, treachery, and a knack for buying Congressmen. One of the earth's richest stores of natural resources was being handed out for nothing, or for small bribes, to the

first men who asked. It needed no genius to be one of those first men—or, safer still, to be the second man who liquidated the first when he had grabbed more than he could manage. It took determination to hold the plunder, but not much to get it. To the railway builders alone there was given a hundred and fifty-eight million acres of land, with “all the coal, copper, oil, gold, silver under them, all the timber and stone above them.” Collis Huntington, stunned at the vast booty that was pressed upon him, telegraphed from Washington to his partner in California: “We have drawn the Elephant.” The same thing was happening to his *confrères*. There remained only the congenial task of cheating one another for the carcasses. Such slack conditions do not breed great robbers; they breed magnified sneak-thieves.

To attack these men to-day is not merely to vent anger that had better be saved for living enemies. Here is a sardonic example of Hamilton’s “rich and well-born.” They had America at their mercy for seventy years. It is vital that we should judge them by what they did. Time and the publicity agents have begun to build these barons into popular figures of heroic size. It is vital that we should see them as they were: small, greedy and pusillanimous. Above all, it is vital that America should separate her national heroes from her national devils. There is no room in one nation’s heart for Jefferson, Lincoln, Rockefeller, and Jay Gould—for the men who gave America a vision of greatness and the men who dishonoured that vision before the world. The American people have free will; it is their privilege to choose either pair; but in God’s name let them stop pretending to choose both.

## 4

During the so-called Progressive Era (roughly from 1904, the election of Theodore Roosevelt to the Presi-



dency in his own right, to 1920, the election of Harding) the United States tried to destroy the new plutocracy and to bring historic America back to life. There had been such attempts before, the most striking being the Populist Movement which nearly elected Bryan to the Presidency in 1896. But they had all failed; and the Progressives failed as well, in spite of electing two Presidents and several Governors and State Legislatures. They failed, so far as their efforts in Washington went, because Theodore Roosevelt did not understand the economic evils that underlay the political evils he was trying to correct, and because Woodrow Wilson only knew the economic evils in general rhetorical terms, such as he might have learned from Jefferson. He did not know them with the harsh realism of a Hamilton or a John Adams.

The essence of the evil that bred and protected American plutocracy was that the United States had too much private enterprise and too little private property. Roosevelt recognized the former fact, but not the latter. He wanted to direct and curb the private enterprise; but he never reached the point of wanting to restore the private property. He and his Progressive friends knew that American democracy was turning into a plutocracy, that many of the local governments were corrupt and that the national government was subservient to the interests of money. And they assumed the trouble was that rich men were so wicked. Roosevelt said the trouble was with "the dull, purblind folly of the very rich men, their greed and arrogance." Now, Roosevelt was probably right in saying that the plutocrats were dull, greedy and arrogant. But he was wrong in thinking that here was the trouble with the country. The trouble with the country was that it had become a plutocracy. Even if President Roosevelt had worked a reformation in every plutocrat, even if he had made them all as cultivated as

the Medici, as witty as an Oscar Wilde peer, and as kind as General Robert E. Lee, the country would still have been a plutocracy. And plutocracy would still have been a bad thing. So long as a small group of people controls most of the means of production, so long as the large majority of the nation owns no real property at all, the country must either be a plutocracy or else a highly centralized autocratic state. It was toward the latter state, in fact, that Theodore Roosevelt was tending.

Napoleon said that a good monarchy was the one protection a people could have against a plutocracy. That is a solution of the problem which is not permissible for America. It is the American task to find a protection other than an autocrat. It is a hard task—an impossible task for a people not economically free. It is interesting to notice that all the liberal Presidents in modern America have tried to play the king in this respect, have tried to save the public from the plutocrats. They have failed because their approach has been unrealistic. Instead of beginning by restoring the citizen's economic freedom, and hence his power of resistance, they have begun by trying to strengthen the machinery of the state, thus tending toward something as bad as what they are trying to ward off: a tyrant state with no visible head.

Knowing that the rich, as a class, would never be benign, Roosevelt felt that the way to solve the problem of plutocracy was to compel the rich to act as if ruled by their imaginations and consciences. So he set to work to control them by government action, to lay down rules as to just what they could do and just what they could not do. But the one thing that can be accomplished by such a course is to change a nation run by a few thousand rich men into a nation run by a few thousand bureaucrats. The change makes little appeal to Americans, who feel that the rich men have at least shown a talent for getting things done, whereas the bureaucrats might be people who

had never tried to run anything more complicated than a classroom. So the Progressives would take one step forward toward the Rooseveltian State Socialism, and then one step back toward rugged individualism (*i.e.*, plutocracy). It is no wonder that in the end they got little done.

Wilson, by temperament, was a Jeffersonian democrat. A real Jeffersonian democrat, in the historic sense of the phrase, is impossible in modern industrial America, because the basis of Jeffersonianism is a state in which there are no industries on a bigger scale than the village crafts. But a modern version of Jeffersonianism is possible. The basis of such a state would be the defence of the little man, the small property-holder, against the centralizing tendency of finance. In other words, the basis is a wide diffusion of property—whereas the basis of Theodore Roosevelt's New Nationalism was a state direction of private enterprise with no attempt to revive the dying institution of private property.

Although Theodore Roosevelt and Wilson were both expressions of the same Progressive Revolt, there is a profound difference between their respective programmes. In the days of the Adamsses, when widely diffused private property still existed, it would have been enough had private enterprise been controlled by the state, been prevented from destroying the existing system of property. The great contribution of the Adamsses to American political thought was to point out that although there was bound to be a wide division between rich and poor, it was vital (for freedom and self-government) that the state prevent this division from becoming *too* wide, prevent the rich from becoming so rich that they owned other men's lives and the poor from becoming so poor that they owned nothing but their hats. By the time of Theodore Roosevelt and Wilson this sorry change had already taken place. It was too late merely to restrain

private enterprise. That would not give America back her freedom or her democracy. The time had come when private property had to be *restored*, not protected. Theodore Roosevelt never saw this fact. Wilson, to judge from a number of his speeches, was on the verge of seeing it. His Jeffersonian principles would incline him that way, and so would his association with Bryan.

It is not possible to tell what Wilson might have done toward re-establishing private property had not the World War come at the end of his first seventeen months in office. After August, 1914, Wilson's attention was turned abroad. Domestic affairs had to wait till he had time for them, and he never again did have time. It is a safe guess, however, that Wilson would not have succeeded in creating the simpler society of his dreams, though he might have prepared the way for someone else to do this work. He would not have succeeded himself because he did not understand the financial system which was at the basis of the way of life he wanted to destroy. That he did not understand this system, that he did not see the purpose it was really serving, is shown by the fact that his proudest legislative achievement is the Federal Reserve Act. This was a well-conceived Act; but its effect was to strengthen the financial system, to make it less vulnerable in the face of panics. And the financial system which the Act strengthens leads toward the expropriation of America.

It was Wilson's job, if he wished to revive American democracy, to see that the drift of property into the hands of the financier came to an end. Heaven knows, America is in need of a "sound banking system." But if it is an undesirable system to begin with, making it sound will merely make it harder to uproot. The British banking system is admirably sound. The "Big Five" banks of England have paid 12 per cent. to 18 per cent. dividends right through the most terrible years of the depression.

No bank is ever known to fail in modern England. But the customers fail. The great basic industries fail. The man-power of the nation fails.

The whole course of modern British finance, from the beginning to the approaching end, has been put very neatly by Mr. Chesterton in ten lines of verse. This was the system of finance which Hamilton understood and loved from the moment it was born, and which he worked hard to introduce in his adopted country. It is the system which demands great inequalities of wealth, since only thus can enough capital be mobilized for the system's more audacious efforts. Mr. Chesterton begins with an eighteenth-century poet's comment on the system, made in its early youth when most men were still saluting it with joy.

"Ill fares the land, to hastening woe a prey,  
Where Wealth accumulates and Men decay."  
So rang of old the noble voice in vain  
O'er the last Peasants wandering on the plain;  
Doom has reversed the riddle and the rhyme,  
While sinks the commerce reared upon that crime,  
The thriftless towns litter with lives undone,  
To whom our madness left no joy but one;  
And irony that glares like Judgment Day  
Sees Men accumulate and Wealth decay.

It is important to see how the existing system of money and banking, which America has copied from England (taking all its worst features and omitting the features that make the British system "sound"), leads to a greater and greater concentration of property, to a more and more thorough destruction of self-government and of the American dream. Before discussing the system, however, I want to dissociate myself from the enthusiasts who charge that it is all "a banker's plot." As I understand history it is nothing of the sort. A money system is usually an expression of the way of life, the system of values, of the society it serves. The

American money system is a mirror of the commercial and industrial and moral life of Civilized, big-city America. As part of my effort to describe that America, and to explain how during the century of progress it came to dominate the real America, I must describe the money system. But I am not implying that a mere book-keeper's revolution would cure the evils that beset Western man.

No money system can add a farthing to a nation's real wealth, but a bad money system can tangle up a nation's wealth and make it partly unavailable. Similarly, no money system can in itself create a good society, but a bad money system may easily prevent such a society from coming into being. There is reason to fear that the present system in America is bad enough to do exactly this—assuming that by “a good society” we mean a society wherein the average American can hope to own real property.

The essence of the currency system is that as much as nine-tenths of the nation's money is created by the banks in the form of loans (or credits to their customers) which can be drawn upon by cheque. The general public, to a surprising extent, has remained ignorant of this fact, continuing to think that “money” means either bank-notes or metal coins. The insignificance of metal or paper money, when compared with credit-money is suggested by the following figures. In 1929, the ratio of cash to total bank deposits was 11·3 per cent. in the United Kingdom, 7·4 per cent. in France, and 7·3 per cent. in the United States. In 1930, bank deposits in the United States were \$42,996,000,000. In the same year bank-notes amounted to \$698,000,000. Another sign of the insignificance of gold or paper, as compared to the money created by the banks, is this: between 1819 and 1914 the actual gold in Great Britain increased by about £100,000,000. According to the law there could

be very little more than £100,000,000 of paper issued against this gold. Yet between 1819 and 1914, deposits in the British banks increased by over £1,200,000,000. Where did that extra billion pounds come from? It was not gold money. It was not paper money. It was bank-money: loans credited to the borrower's account and drawn upon by cheque.

These figures dispose of two popular delusions. The first delusion is that the money lent by the banks is merely the money the banks have received from their depositors. There is such unwillingness, even on the part of the people who must be presumed to know the facts, to admit that most of the money in modern England and America has been created by the banking systems, that I shall reinforce the point by quoting from a professional economist, Mr. R. F. Harrod of Oxford University:

There is a temptation to say that the bank can only lend what has been deposited with it. Such a notion is a most fertile source of delusions. It is true that if I desire to take my loan away in the form of gold, the bank can only satisfy me if someone has previously deposited gold with it. But if I am satisfied with notes or a cheque-book, the position is very different. The bank by making me the loan has created new circulating medium. . . . If I withdraw the loan in gold for export or false teeth, then it is true that no new money will have come into existence. . . . But so long as the credit account or notes generated by my borrowing continue to circulate, so much extra circulating medium remains outstanding. The repayment of the loan entails an opposite result. Part of the outstanding circulating medium is cancelled. . . .

If on computing the quantity of circulating medium outstanding all overdrafts and other forms of outstanding bank lending were subtracted, little would be left. For by far the greater part of the circulating medium had its inception in bank loans and would disappear if the loans were withdrawn. Loans are, it is true, continually being repaid, but simultaneously new loans are issued, so that at any point of time there is a quantity

of bank loans outstanding almost as great as the total of the circulating medium.

Since, as Mr. Harrod points out, practically all the money in existence consists of bank-loans, or of debt to the banks, it is no wonder there is a tendency for property to drift into the hands of the financial system.

The second delusion we should now be rid of is the idea that when a country like modern England or modern America is on the gold standard, the money in use is really convertible into gold. For a long time our so-called "sound" money has been convertible into gold only so long as scarcely anyone wanted to convert it; it has been quite inconvertible as soon as there is a large demand for conversion. An amusing example of the real relation between gold and "money" (*i.e.*, bank-credit) under the Gold Exchange Standard is given by Professor Groseclose, who has condensed a passage from Madden and Nadler's *Foreign Securities*:

An Austrian corporation has issued a long-term loan in New York, the net proceeds of which are \$1,000,000. The corporation, which needs *schillings*, has sold the proceeds of the loan to a Viennese bank. The latter in turn has sold the credit with the banks in New York to the Austrian national bank. This has increased the "metallic reserve" of the latter, and enabled it to increase its notes in circulation or demand deposits by about \$3,000,000. . . . As these notes or deposits were in turn reserves for the commercial banks, commercial credit of three or four times this amount could be created.

The loan to the Austrian corporation of \$1,000,000 resulted in an equal increase in deposits on the books of the New York bank with which the proceeds of the loan were deposited. Against this deposit the New York bank had to maintain a reserve with the Federal Reserve Bank of thirteen per cent., or \$130,000. The latter in turn was required to maintain a reserve of thirty-five per cent. against its deposits, or \$45,000. Thus, under the gold-exchange-standard system, against an actual gold reserve of less than \$50,000 in the Federal Reserve



Bank of New York, a central bank operating on the gold exchange standard was able to increase its notes in circulation by about \$3,000,000, upon which, in turn, the commercial banks could build a deposit credit structure of \$10,000,000 to \$12,000,000.<sup>1</sup>

This is what is known as "economy in the use of gold." It is also, oddly enough, known as a form of the gold standard. It is known as "sound money,"—the sort of money with which only cranks would want to "monkey." In plain fact, it is a dangerous fraud, complicating the money problem to the point where the average man cannot possibly understand what is happening, where he can be fooled into thinking that his money is really convertible into gold.

Perhaps, as many economists think, a money which is honestly convertible into gold is best for society. Conceivably, as others hold, the best system is a purely conventional, completely "managed" currency. The one thing that cannot be best, that cannot even be good, is a system that calls itself one thing and is really another. Characteristically, it was just such a system that was perfected during the century of progress.

The motive for developing this system, however, was not to enslave mankind, or even to exalt the banker. That is too simple a view. If it were true, we could cure the world by shooting all the bankers; but I doubt if even a reformer can really believe that. Father Coughlin tells his radio audience that the way money comes into being is: "first, a group of wealthy men petition the government for a bank charter, or, in other words, for the right to counterfeit legally."<sup>2</sup> This makes the American money system sound like a simple conspiracy between two groups of thieves. I wish it were, for then America could quickly be quit of it. But the money system,

<sup>1</sup> *Money*, pp. 239-40.

<sup>2</sup> I quote from the *New York Times* of March 12th, 1935.

unhappily, is something worse than that: it is an expression of human greed, of the cruel lust for power that our pagan world does little to control. The modern money system is a supremely clever device for turning everything we own or hope to own, everything we have made or plan to make, into some form of currency or credit, so that then we can gamble with it. It is the world's most fantastic get-rich-quick system, and it works just about as well as such systems usually do.

The Midas Complex [writes Professor Groseclose], the desire to turn everything into money, to get a higher and higher money equivalent for the production of farm and factory, to make money cheaper and easier to acquire, either by loan or exchange, has become in the second half of the nineteenth century the dominant theme in the symphony of American civilization. After the Civil War era, which marked the final defeat of agrarian economy and the submergence of American life into mercantilism and industrialism, the manna of cheap money became the universal cry, and as with the Israelites, the easier the manna was acquired, the louder became the complaint, the less willing the people to struggle for it. The deposit mechanism, in the hands of unregulated commercial banking, became the means of satisfying the demands of the commercial community for easier credit and cheaper money, while at the same time providing a harvest in profits to the banking interests that catered to the public demand. . . .

Money, it becomes apparent as we survey its modern development, is nothing more than debt—a vast structure of lead thinly veneered with gold. What men accept for their daily toil and for the product of the field or work bench is not a tangible substance endowed with intrinsic value but an evidence of debt. . . .

A system of bank deposit money must be constantly supported by a flow of interest payments to the banking system for its services in providing the medium of payment. As interest payments themselves are made in this same deposit currency, the process involves a constant increase of credit money in order to supply the necessary funds for these interest payments. This is obvious if we realize that to support the

nearly forty-three billion dollars of commercial deposit in 1930, at an interest rate of three per cent., would require over a billion and a quarter dollars annually. To discharge such a sum in actual money (gold) would require some three times as much gold as was produced by the world in that year. . . .

By the device of credit supplied initially by the fecund banking system, the American people were enabled to run into debt to the extent of ninety-nine billion dollars during the eight years from 1921 to 1929, or enough to buy up the entire United States at its 1900 valuation. *All this debt was incurred to buy goods above ground and on the market in exchange for wealth that was in the ground and in the future.* The extent to which the future was mortgaged may be visualized by noting that Moody's Manual recently listed \$1,200,000,000 of American bonds, dated to mature after A.D. 2000—a yoke laid by this spendthrift age upon three generations not yet born. Or by the sale of a lot in Miami in 1926 at \$1,500,000, or another for a price that would have compelled the purchaser—had he intended utilizing the lot—to build an office building two hundred stories high, with all offices rented in perpetuity at the abnormal rentals then prevailing.<sup>1</sup>

Here we have the final stage of finance capitalism. Starting with Hamilton's thesis that extreme inequality of wealth is good because it makes for the capital accumulations with which to play expensive games, the system piles up to the point where it pawns all its wealth in the present and all its hopes in the future in order to raise the cash to make part payments on ever more grandiose schemes. And in the end, with feverish eyes still searching the horizon for hope, finance capitalism is hauled into the bankruptcy court, where with pleasing irony it gives its name as The Highest Standard of Living Ever Known.

The common defence for the system is that unless it had been evolved the nineteenth century would have seen less material progress, that such movements as the industrial revolution and the opening of our own West

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 246-51.

would have had to go more slowly if America had financed them out of real income instead of by coining her future hopes. The defence may have sounded sensible in 1910; it is certainly not worth refuting to-day. All we need do now is notice that the money system is as unstable as the economic order it helped to create, that they are both on the way out, and that we must find saner systems to replace them. The present American money-system is the perfect reflection of the moral and intellectual chaos that are the fruits of a century of progress. And it is a system perfectly adapted to forcing the concentration of property in fewer and fewer hands. When practically all the money used is a form of debt to the banks, it is no wonder that each time one of the fierce convulsions which must attack so unstable a system is upon us, finance takes control of a new big section of the nation's means of production.

No one could build a Jeffersonian state, a nation of self-governing owners, on the basis of this mad gambler's finance. Even if Woodrow Wilson's hands had been free during his eight years of the Presidency, he could not have done much toward establishing the nation of his dreams so long as he felt that all the money system needed was to be strengthened and to be made more flexible. That was what it needed, quite truly, if America wanted to go forward to bigger concentrations of wealth, if she wanted to go forward to the 1920's. But if America was interested in building a nation of free men, her money system needed a good deal of throwing away. It needed to be replaced by a system where money would be something more honest and more tangible than a larky bet on the future.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It encourages those of us who believe in the American dream to find that the most orthodox, the "soundest," economists are coming to share this view. Compare, for example, Dr. F. A. Hayek, who argues (I think conclusively) that to avoid disaster capitalism must finance its new enter-

Woodrow Wilson's Liberalism, like Theodore Roosevelt's Progressivism, was doomed by its own failure in analysis to peter out into Warren Harding and "normalcy."

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prises out of savings, not out of hopes, not out of credit. Such a policy would at once diminish the get-rich-quick and get-poor-quick tendencies in modern society. In a nation of property-owners, such a policy would be favourable to small property; but in a proletarian nation, a nation of wage-earners, the ruthless wage-cuts that must go with this policy would lead to revolt, and revolt would lead to fascism. One lesson of modern economic history is this: where capitalism means a real system of private property, capitalism means democracy and freedom; where capitalism means a nation of wage-earners and the control of real property by high finance, capitalism must end in the tyrant state. The first form of this state will be fascism. Later, perhaps, will come the tyrant state of Marx; but I think the Twilight of the West is more probable. America can do a lot to postpone that twilight, if she dares to try to be a free state, to reject the road that leads toward tyranny.

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## CHAPTER THREE

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### I

LUCKILY, the system the Progressives were half blindly fighting carried its own destruction within it. The period in American history which began with the close of the Civil War came to an end in February, 1933. The "rich and well-born" had failed to make a go of oligarchy in economics combined with pseudo-democracy in politics. They had promised prosperity for everyone, and the country had gone bankrupt; there was no denying that an error had crept into their calculations somewhere. But they had accomplished two things during their long reign, and both need to be undone.

The first thing they had accomplished was the virtual destruction of the old property system of America—the virtual destruction, that is, of the "little man." The free farmer of Lincoln's day was becoming more and more often the tenant of the mortgage-holder. The "merchant at the cross-roads store" of Bryan's day was becoming more and more often the manager of a branch of a chain-store company.<sup>1</sup> The machine-shop and the small factory were disappearing. More and more Americans were on wages,<sup>2</sup> which means that they were economically unfree. The wage depends on the distant workings of finance; it may be cut in two to-morrow if there is a panic on the London stock-exchange; it may be abolished when the next slump liquidates the next

<sup>1</sup> 51,354 grocers went out of business in 1933.

<sup>2</sup> In 1932, about three-quarters of the Americans who did full-time work of any sort were wage-earners or salary-earners.

unbearable pile of debts. The man on a wage is economically unfree, though he owns two cars and has an income weekly that a French farmer does not see in a year. He is unfree because he owns nothing of which the worth, or the return to him, is dependent on his personal effort, nothing from which he could find salvation if men whose names are unknown and whose faces he has never seen should happen to ruin him. He has no power of resistance to the whims of a distant bureaucrat or a distant boss. He has not even the dignity that communism would give him, of belonging to a state with a respect-worthy purpose. He is riff-raff. He is one of the millions of anonymous servants of finance. He is not important enough to have been given a number, for nobody really cares whether he turns up at work, or not. There are thousands like him, who can do the job as well as he.

For a picture of such a man's position, turn to the report on the automobile industry by the N. R. A. Research and Planning Division :

One of the psychological problems faced by the automobile worker to-day is the gamble that he knows he is facing as he goes to work each day. He sees the men waiting at the gate for an interview for employment. If he is feeling badly on a particular day and slows down in his gait his straw-boss or foreman tells him, "Step on it; if you don't want the job there are thousands outside who do," or "Look out the window and see the men waiting in line for your job."

Whether or not it be true, large numbers of individual workers are convinced that it is the plan of various plants to maintain lines outside of the employment gates whether or not men are being hired, so as to make individuals feel their jobs are less secure and hence to make them "step on it" a little harder.

It should be remembered that automobile workers are in a privileged position, when compared with the workers in such industries as coal and textiles.

Is this a way of life for a free citizen? It is not dignified. It is not secure. It gives no basis for hope. A slave in the cotton-fields of the old South would have more feeling of "belonging" in the scheme of things than a factory hand under such conditions. And the factory hand's job is not only insecure, but boring: a mechanical repetition, with only one claim on the worker's skill—that he should go faster and faster. No sane man could take pleasure from such a task. It is just something to be endured so that he can get a little food—like a trained seal doing his tricks resignedly in the hope of being flung a fish.

At the Century of Progress Fair there was a game in which the player throws a ball at a target. If he hits the target, the door of a cage flies open and a little pig is let out. The pig trots forward, slides down a chute, crosses a sawdust floor, enters a small doorway and then climbs a flight of stairs back to his cage. Time after time I watched the pigs go through this routine. They were young pigs, yet they showed no faintest sign of interest, either in their own actions or in the chatterings of the crowd. Slide down the chute—pick yourself up—trot across the sawdust—climb the stairs; there was never even a twitch of the tail for variety. Every movement was bored and perfunctory. I did not think animals could be subjected to such a mood, though I knew our century of progress had made it the prevailing daytime mood of the factory workers of America. But the men can vary their monotonous hours by feeling indignation and fear. To that extent, I suppose, they are better off than the pigs.

The second accomplishment of the "rich and well-born" was to impose on a very large number of Americans two ideas, both false. The first idea is that the concentration of ownership which has gone so far toward destroying historic America was inevitable, that it was



economically determined once man had made the basic inventions which led to the industrial revolution. And the second idea is that the result of this concentration of ownership, the result of the whole century of progress, has been a higher standard of living for the American public than any nation has dared hope for in the past. Between them these two lies have done a lot to keep America quiet while she was being betrayed, while the whole meaning of her heritage was being falsified. But it is not true that as soon as somebody invented a steam-engine, things like Jay Gould became inevitable; and it is not true that America, in spite of all the hardships of the period of reorganization, emerged from her industrial revolution with a standard of living for her citizens which was the envy of the world. These two lies must be destroyed before Americans can face with honesty either their present plight or their hope for the future.

To dispel the first of these lies it is necessary to distinguish between the factory system and the machine. The machine is a tool for creating wealth; if used with wisdom it should be a blessing; there is no reason why the machine need have fastened mass-production upon most American industries.

It was the system of the subdivision of labour, introduced in England as early as the seventeenth century, that turned the old workshop into a factory, preparing the way for the degradation of manual work. The classic illustration of the subdivision of labour is that given in *The Wealth of Nations*, where Adam Smith describes with pleasure an eighteenth-century pin factory.

In the way in which this business is now carried on [he writes] not only the whole work is a peculiar trade, but it is divided into a number of branches, of which the greater part are likewise peculiar trades. One man draws out the wire, another straightens it, a third cuts it, a fourth points it, a fifth grinds it at the top for receiving the head; to make the head

requires two or three distinct operations; to put it on is a peculiar business, to whiten the pins is another; it is even a trade by itself to put them into the paper; and the important business of making a pin is, in this manner, divided into about eighteen distinct operations, which, in some manufacturies, are all performed by distinct hands.

Adam Smith found this system wholly good, and for no better reason than that he thought the world's supply of pins would be increased thereby. It follows from his thought, for example, that if a group of natives in Baluchistan, each of whom was accustomed to the tranquil creative work of making rugs, could also be herded into a factory, and if each of the ex-rug-makers could be given some small division of his old job to do, then Baluchistan would soon be producing a surplus of rugs. And these rugs could be exchanged against the British pins (assuming that the natives of Baluchistan could be civilized, could be made pin-conscious). And all concerned would be wealthier. It would have made no difference to Adam Smith that all concerned had exchanged good lives for inferior lives, interesting jobs for deadly jobs; he was content so long as there were more rugs and more pins. But the men who worked in the pin factory were not content. "It is even a trade by itself to put them into the paper." The men who used to feel themselves creators because they took the raw material and did all the work needed to turn it into a finished product, but who now spent their lives at the "trade" of tucking pins into pieces of paper—they were not content. It would take many a gallon of cheap gin, many a gaudy night in the new factory towns, to "drown the memory of that insolence."

Although they were not content, although they protested bitterly, the workers in the new factories had not the freedom to protest hard enough. And the moral leaders of the community, who at first saw the bad side of the

new system, did not protest hard enough, either. Both groups were quieted by being assured, over and over, that this was the way in which everyone in the long run would grow richer and richer. The assurance was not only irrelevant; it was a lie.

Here, then, is the first stage in the process that has led us to the modern proletarian, dispossessed, industrial community. England made a choice—and not a blind choice, but a choice that was largely conscious. England thought she could grow richer if she abandoned creative work for the mechanical subdivision of labour. So she chose to try the new system, at whatever cost in degradation of living.

The “division of labour” is the normal human system, wherein one man makes shoes, another makes tools, another wine, etc. This is creative work. The “subdivision of labour” is the factory system, wherein no one man carries through a process from start to finish. It is the subdivision of labour, and not the coming of machinery, which has helped to destroy freedom and real property over much of the modern world.<sup>1</sup> The machine, in all its latest ingenuity, can be applied to the system of the division of labour just as well as to the system of the subdivision of labour. The machine can be as good a friend to the small owner as to the big. In fact, the machine may make it easy for us, in many fields of modern industry, to change the giant factory with its inhuman relationships into a shop where the average man can again participate in real ownership, and can again do creative work.

The herding of workmen into factories, and the subdivision of labour into small mechanical tasks, encouraged the invention of machinery. It would not have been

<sup>1</sup> In England the subdivision of labour, the factory system, antedated the industrial revolution. And the average British workman was dispossessed before the days of the machine.

possible, at the dawn of the machine age, to invent a device that would take a lump of metal and a roll of paper and turn them into a thousand packages of pins. But it was possible to invent a device that would take a spool of wire, draw it out straight, and cut it into lengths. In such small ways the machine age began.

With the coming of the new machines, America had her vital decision to make. In America, the average white workman was not yet dispossessed. There was a chance to adapt the machine, slowly, to the requirements of a free nation. America chose to adapt the free nation to the requirements of a get-rich-quick exploitation of the machine. These new means of production were expensive. As a result, if they were to be introduced with the utmost speed into all industries, there had to be heavy capitalization. And, as Hamilton saw from the beginning, heavy capitalization would become easier and easier, the more fully the American tendency toward a wide distribution of property was broken down. The reason for this is simple. Suppose there were a million families in the America of Hamilton's day, and suppose each family had an income of \$1000. That would make a national income of \$1,000,000,000. But with this equal distribution it would be hard for the individual families to save more than a hundred dollars a year apiece. That would mean that the national savings would be unlikely to exceed a hundred million. Excluding the various ways of raising money on future hopes, this hundred million dollars would be all such a nation would have with which to promote new industries or mechanize old ones.

Suppose, however, that the same nation of a million families had an uneven division of property. Suppose that nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand families had an income of three hundred dollars apiece; the income of the remaining thousand families would average over \$700,000. Out of this, if the incentive were keen

enough, they could comfortably save \$650,000 a year per family—which would mean that the national saving could be as high as \$650,000,000 a year. Compare this with the paltry hundred million dollars saved by the society in which property was widely distributed.

It follows, therefore, that a society with extreme inequalities of property will make more rapid "progress" in a time of transition than a society where property is distributed. If the question be raised, "Progress toward what?" the average apologist for Big Business would answer, "Progress toward a higher standard of living for the whole community." He would say it was only by putting up with widespread poverty for a time that we can ensure a prosperous nation in the long run. The answer, to-day, sounds a little feeble. America is a potentially rich nation; she has put up with increasingly widespread poverty for a hundred years, and she has come out with widespread destitution as her reward. But it is worth noticing that Hamilton would never have made this shaky answer. He was not interested in a high standard of living for the whole community. He was interested in building a plutocracy, a business man's oligarchy, in which the interests of the "rich and well-born" would be forwarded by the state and in which the state would gain stability from the patronage and support of the rich.

America, facing her first great decision as an independent state, had two choices: to try to become a free nation, or to try to become a big, transatlantic version of the societies of Europe. A free nation would have been a new thing under the sun, a contribution for which mankind would have given thanks. But Hamilton did not want a free nation. He did his best to build institutions that would one day abolish freedom in order to vie with the mother-country, where a small class was daily growing richer and better born.

Here is one reason why colonial nations have seldom been important in the world. They are not self-confident enough to do the new thing toward which their spirit and their circumstances incline them; they are not able to do the old thing as well as the parent-world which invented it. America should not, for example, have tried to compete with the old world in the production of a conventional aristocracy. Had America made, and preserved, a true democracy, she might by this time be producing, out of the happier mixtures among her better stock, as distinguished a minority as the world has seen. And its distinction would be the greater if its chief mark were not the size of its possessions. But instead of seeing that this was her real job, and sticking to it, America has turned aside to play the old game, and to play it badly. She has produced "an aristocracy of wealth" which is an international joke.

Mr. Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr., has just written a book called *Farewell to Fifth Avenue*, in which he lists the men and women who, according to "social leaders," form "the Backbone of American Society." There are seventy-five names on the list, including sixteen Vanderbilts or Vanderbilts-in-law, as well as many other descendants of the robber barons. Now, it must be obvious that any "Society," the backbone of which includes sixteen members of the Vanderbilt family, is a ludicrous affair. For that family is not, and never was, the stuff of which healthy spines are made. It was founded by a ferocious trickster of the middle nineteenth century—a miserly old man, only less shocking in his cruelty than the original Astor, only less treacherous than the original Gould.<sup>1</sup> Since this poor beginning, there have been four generations of Vanderbilts. Many of them have

<sup>1</sup> Vanderbilt has been cited, by Mr. H. G. Wells and others, as an example of vision and creativeness on the part of a robber baron. But cp. Matthew Josephson, *op. cit.*, pp. 13 ff.

been colourful and uproarious; some have been harmlessly dull; but which of them has done anything in public to alleviate their name? Compare this raffish crew with the aristocracy of Great Britain (even of modern Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), and it will be clear why America looks foolish when she plays that game. In selfishness, in scorn of other men and of their interests, there may be little to choose between the English lords and our own barons. But the British aristocrat, however callous toward the individual man or woman, had a sense of public responsibility, of *noblesse oblige*, that made him work hard to serve his country.

As "property" becomes more and more a matter of paper, of lottery tickets, the propertied class begins to resemble this "backbone" of our own society. If a man cashes in on the Irish sweep, he will not gain in moral stature as a result. Neither will he gain in moral stature if he bets successfully on the future price of wheat. It is no sign of failure in the national character that America has not built an aristocracy out of such material. No nation could. But it is a sign of failure in the national wisdom that she should ever have tried. Going her own way, she might by this time have learned to find, and to use, her genuinely superior citizens. Following the lead of her colonial-minded "rich and well-born," she has produced a comic "Society," the members of which feel flattered and at home when they are asked to sell their names for cash.<sup>1</sup> And of what use is this

<sup>1</sup> For example, in the advertising columns of the *Cosmopolitan Magazine* for April, 1935, there are pictures of Mr. Percy Rivington Pyne, 2nd, his dining-room at Roslyn, his swimming-pool, his Reynolds, and his hired yacht. The text accompanying this display says, among other things, "It is no accident that men such as Mr. Pyne, with wealth and tradition behind them, are constant users of Listerine Tooth Paste." Similarly, it is no accident that the American public is lacking in respect for its rich men, and that the pretensions of these men to form an aristocracy are greeted with a bawdy laugh.

Society to the country? The robber barons had but one interest in public life: to make sure that it remained corrupt, so that no one could interfere with their pirate raids. And the descendants of the robber barons have either carried on this tradition, or else they have no interest in politics at all.

Mr. Belloc wrote long ago: "There is no conceivable link in reason or in experience which binds capitalization of a new process with the idea of a few employing owners and a mass of employed non-owners working at a wage. Such great discoveries, coming in a society like that of the thirteenth century would have blest and enriched mankind. Coming upon the diseased moral conditions of the eighteenth century in this country, they proved a curse."

The "great discoveries" ought not to have proved a curse for America, because America was supposed to be dedicated to the attempt to create a free society. The attempt, however, was only taken seriously in rural communities and west of the Appalachian Mountains. The leaders in the rich eastern cities preferred, like good colonials, to tag after mother. Hamilton's financial policies, his funded national debt, his "sound" national bank, his plea for infant industries, were all directed toward creating a small, strong class of rich men who in turn could be counted on to reduce a good percentage of their fellowmen to the status of proletarians. It was the colonial-minded "rich and well-born" who foisted expropriation upon America. This was not the fault of the machine. The industrial revolution merely created a rich temptation to betray the American dream. America could have had that revolution without betraying her dream; only not so fast, and not so much to the advantage of a few men. But she gave in to the temptation, she abandoned the purpose which would have given her dignity and a place among the nations, and then she



tried to excuse herself by calling her moral failure "Fate." The Jeffersonians, who were more interested in the American dream than in copying mother, were ignorant of finance and did not understand what was happening until it was too late. And when they did begin to protest, the colonial-minded plutocracy tried to quiet them by pointing to the grim lies of the post-Ricardian economists of Great Britain, who were busy proving with an infernal zeal that any decent, human solution to the economic problem was "scientifically impossible."

The whole story of the dispossession, then, is the story of human weakness, not of destiny or of "scientific law." So long ago as the seventeenth century, Englishmen decided that they could grow richer if they abandoned creative work for the subdivision of labour and the factory system. And in the nineteenth century, Americans decided they could grow richer if they abandoned the American dream in favour of the inequalities and expropriations which would make huge capital investments quick and easy. And the climax of the tale came in the "robber baron" era following the Civil War, when America decided she could grow richer still if she accepted the centralization of financial control in the hands of a banking monopoly. The American public was persuaded that if it gave up the foolish attempt to prosper by printing paper, or coining silver, and allowed the banks to make and unmake its money in the form of credit, everyone would have more money in the end. So the banks were given their way. They certainly raised a great deal of money—which means that they let the public contract a great deal of debt. And the natural end was that with every decade more and more property passed from the hands of the small private owner into the control of the financial system. But this era of "high finance," with its credit-money and its

fantastic mortgaging of the future, did not *have* to happen.

Just because, in the years before the Civil War, America had a bad money system, frequently a prey to the debtor's ignorance of the distinction between wealth and money, this does not mean that after the Civil War America was compelled to have a money system that was frequently a prey to the gambler's ignorance of the distinction between wealth and hope. America chose this system, as she chose each critical change that has made for expropriation, out of greed. But it was not the machine's fault that Americans were greedy; and it was not the fault of Fate. Americans dupe themselves when they say that the present state of America is inevitable. It is only inevitable if America, as a nation, is doomed to be for ever unworthy of her dreams and of her opportunities. It might relieve her of guilty feelings if she could claim such a doom; but luckily for her future she cannot.

## 2

If America had really grown rich as a result of these successive choices, if she really possessed the standard of living about which she has bragged so long, she might now be lost. It might now be too late to do anything but give sentimental reverence to the American dream. But America has not grown rich. She tried to sell her birthright, but she has not yet received the mess of pottage. So there may still be time to revoke the sale. But first Americans have got to realize the simple fact that they are *not* rich—if by "they" is meant the average American citizen. They have got to stop grinning with a silly pleasure at their empty plates, assuring each other that such lavish pottage is the envy of the world.

"It is literally true," said the leading editorial in the

*Chicago Tribune* for August 14th, 1934, "that a family toward the lower end of the scale in America to-day lives a more comfortable and a more healthful life than was led by European potentates a few centuries ago." And in 1928, in the days when only 60 per cent. of American families lacked basic necessities, a Harvard professor whose name it would be brutal to recall wrote as follows: "For the first time in history the masses themselves in this country are emerging into a condition of prosperity comparable to that of the aristocracies of any previous age." And he added, "There is absolutely no reason why the widely diffused prosperity which we are now witnessing should not permanently increase."

"You business executives sitting at your desks," declared an advertisement of the *True Story Magazine* in 1929, "you have been making a fairy-tale come true. Within ten years you have done more toward the sum total of human happiness than has ever been done before in all the centuries of historical time."

It is comments like this that may yet destroy America. If the leaders of America give their fellow-citizens the feeling that to defend American institutions means to insult the brains of suffering men and women, that to be a conservative means to be a howling monkey, how can those leaders talk about the American dream and expect people to keep a straight face?

Consider for a moment the real life of "a family toward the lower end of the scale in America to-day." It will not be necessary, in order to get a dramatic contrast, to compare this family with the "European potentates of a few centuries ago." Compare it with the poorest peasant in France, and the contrast will be bitter enough.

In New York City, with its savage winter climate, there are thirty thousand tenements with no heat and two thousand with no plumbing—that is, with outside toilets. In the basement of such a building in Harlem ten families

are living. Each family has a little stall, the size of a coal-bunker in a suburban house. The stalls are open at the end, and of course there is neither heat in winter nor air in summer. Near the middle of the basement is a small square place where the floor is made of brick. Here all the families do their cooking, building a fire on the floor, trusting to luck that it will not burn down the house. There are no washing facilities, of course, and no toilet.

In a similar building near by lives a very old negro woman, in a cubby-hole all to herself. The house is several storeys high above her little room, yet in bad weather she has to keep an umbrella up, sheltering as much as possible of her chair and table from the water that drips through the ceiling. She is a kindly, philosophic old woman; yet she might make a rude remark if told that an editor of the *Chicago Tribune* thought her creature comforts were superior to those of Louis XIV.

These people represent very fairly the families "toward the lower end of the scale in America to-day." They are well above the bottom of the scale. They are not down and out. They do not even belong to that group of about twenty-two million Americans who are on some form of public relief. With the exception of the old woman, who has passed the working age, they are men and women with jobs. Being negroes, and therefore compelled by social pressure to live in a negro district, their white landlords cheat them pitilessly. Instead of paying 20 to 25 per cent. of their income in rent (which is normal for white families in such circumstances) the negroes in Harlem often have to pay as high as 48 per cent. So their standard of living is lower than it need be if they were treated with justice. On the other hand, they have jobs—which puts them at once among the lucky ones in America to-day. But still they live in a cold and airless sty. And it is not wise for Americans to run their

country on the pretence that people like this are mighty lucky to be so well treated.

Two summers ago, in September, my wife and I were climbing in the mountains of High Savoy. On our way down to the valley one afternoon we were caught by a heavy hailstorm at 7500 feet. With a good deal of pain we made our way down another thousand feet; we then came on what must be one of the poorest farms in France. It was set in a tiny spot of pasture land, where for a few acres the bare stone of the mountain-side levelled out enough for grass to grow. There was a tiny stone cottage with a dirt floor and a wooden partition dividing the kitchen from the one other room. There was a stone barn and a tool-shed. A man and his wife and two children lived in the cottage; another man shared the barn with the animals. The farmer had a kitchen-garden, a few chickens, a pig, and half a dozen death-defying alpine cows who must have known their way from this patch of green to others roundabout. Two miles down the mountain-side was a village, where the farmer took his cheese and exchanged it for wine and occasional tiny chunks of meat. How he ever produced enough of a cash crop to buy a coat or a pair of shoes, I do not know; yet everyone on the farm was clothed.

As French farmers go, this man was at least as far down in the scale of living as the New York tenement-dwellers are in the scale of the American working man. For the New York tenement-dweller, even the Harlem negro, is well above many men in the coalfields, in the textile towns, and among the share-croppers of the South. Yet if I compare that French farmer with the sty-dwellers of Manhattan, my choice is all for the hardships of the High Savoy. The man had a succulent pot of vegetables and of meat-remains bubbling over the fire for family supper; he had wine for rich days; he had no more plumbing than the New Yorkers, but the alternative

was not a city street. And he had security. He owned his crazy patch of land; and unless God washes it all down the mountain-side (as He seemed bent on doing that afternoon), his descendants may still own it in a thousand years. All the pawnbrokers and politicians in the world may cut each other's throats, and life in the High Savoy will not be threatened. But if some miserable fellow like Kreuger shoots himself on the other side of the world, it may mean that half the tenement-dwellers in New York are thrown out on the streets.

From no possible point of view is the life of "a family toward the lower end of the scale in America" good enough. It is not "more comfortable and more healthful" than the life led by "European potentates of a few centuries ago." It is not "emerging into a condition of prosperity comparable to that of the aristocracies of any previous age." It is not, in plain fact, the sort of life which even gives a man a fair chance to save his soul. The poor man in a decent society (such as the Savoyard peasant) may possibly deserve the Biblical appellation of "blessed"; the poor city-dweller in an industrial plutocracy is clearly cursed. He not only lacks comfort and security and hope, but his surroundings tend steadily to debauch him. Who but a saint can keep kindness or dignity or moral strength if he lives like an animal?

Mr. M. A. Hallgren tells of a study of fifteen families living in one of the worst slums in Philadelphia. "In a period of three years there had been reported in the fifteen families thirteen cases of illegitimacy and attacks on girls and women, eleven cases of desertion, three of imbecility, eighteen of communicable diseases, seven of absolute poverty, five of cruelty and incorrigibility, and five of chronic drunkenness." The district in which these families lived is described as follows: "The . . . tenements were almost all narrow three-storey affairs,

one room to a floor. They were without modern heating and plumbing, the majority of them having to depend on outdoor toilets. They were dirty, dingy, and dark, facing upon narrow lanes and courts, some of which were no more than five feet across. Approximately 140,000 people lived in the district."

I have made use throughout this chapter of the statement by the Brookings Institution as to the standard of living of some 60 per cent. of American families in 1929. Before ending my comments on the century of progress I must give some figures, so that readers may be assured that the Brookings Institution is not exaggerating.<sup>1</sup>

In 1928 the Labour Bureau, Inc., prepared figures for what is called a Minimum Health and Decency Budget for a worker's family of husband, wife and three children. This Minimum Budget was to represent "the bottom level of health and decency below which a family cannot go without danger of physical or moral deterioration." I quote the figures for a few of the leading cities of the United States:

	<i>Weekly.</i>	<i>Yearly.</i>
New York . . . . .	\$41.74	\$2,170.61
Rochester . . . . .	43.60	2,267.29
Reading, Pa. . . . .	41.84	2,175.53
Chicago . . . . .	46.98	2,443.20
San Francisco . . . . .	49.16	2,556.62

This estimate is a little higher than that made by the Brookings Institution, and considerably higher than that made by the National Industrial Conference Board, an employers' research organization, which estimated in 1928 that a "fair" standard of living could be kept up by a worker's family, in New York City, for \$31.92 a week.

Compare even the lowest of these figures with what

<sup>1</sup> The figures are taken either from the *American Labour Year Book* or from *Seeds of Revolt*, by M. A. Hallgren, N.Y., 1933.

many workers were actually getting. The Bureau of Labour Statistics, in 1928, published the following wage-rates :<sup>1</sup>

<i>Industry.</i>	<i>Average Full-time Earnings per Week.</i>
Lumber (1925) . . . . .	\$17.77
Slaughtering and meat packing: Cattle-killing department (1925) . . . . .	21.28
Woollen and worsted goods manufacturing ; dye-house labourers (1926) . . . . .	21.98
Machine shops (1925) . . . . .	23.07
Blast furnaces (1926) . . . . .	24.34
Foundries (1925) . . . . .	25.25
Motor-vehicle manufacturing (1925) . . . . .	28.73
Bituminous coal-mining (1926) :	
Inside labourers . . . . .	22.78
Outside labourers . . . . .	23.58
Anthracite coal-mining (1924) :	
Inside labourers . . . . .	29.42
Outside labourers . . . . .	29.45
Metalliferous mines (1924) . . . . .	22.04
Railroads : track labourers (1926) . . . . .	17.00

The Brookings Institution thought the required weekly income, for basic necessities, was about \$38.45. The Labour Bureau, Inc., puts it higher than that. The employers' own organization puts it as low as \$31.92 for New York City. But the facts are that in a number of the country's biggest industries the average weekly wages were never as high as \$30.00 and were sometimes below \$20.00. The weekly earnings of school teachers in 1926 averaged \$25.00 ; the weekly earnings of clergy-

<sup>1</sup> I quote from M. A. Hallgren, *op. cit.*, p. 17. The weekly wages are given under three headings : Lowest District, Highest District, and All Districts. I have quoted only the latter figure, the average for all districts. Mr. Hallgren points out that "the average full-time earnings apply to all of the above industries, except in the case of coal-mining and railroads, where the only available data are for *actual* earnings."



men averaged \$35.00; and according to Mr. Hallgren, "in New York State the weekly earnings of office-workers, including managers, superintendents, and other executives, averaged \$35.88 in October, 1927, and \$36.37 in the following October."

These figures take no account of the insecurity which is the most demoralizing element in the American worker's life. Not only the man who is out of work to-day, but the man who has ever been out of work for a long stretch of time, has a ground-tone of fear to his life. So long as America subjects her proletarian class to that fear, and so long as she pays a majority of her job-holders too little to support life in decency, she might do better not to talk about "making a fairy-tale come true."

Only too often, what America's high standard of living for the masses really amounted to was this: the people told each other they were prosperous so many times that in the end they came to believe it; as a result, they thought it must be safe to buy a lot of gadgets on time-payments. Half-bankrupt farmers, and workmen whose wages were a reproach to civilization, were tricked into betting on their future luck. And then they did not have any future luck.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, in spite of all the figures that have been brought to refute it, to this day the tale of "Coolidge prosperity"

<sup>1</sup> I am not, as will appear in chapter four, blaming the individual business man for this situation. Granted the concentration of ownership, the mass-production methods applied even to industries where these methods are uneconomic, I do not believe that a "high wage capitalism" is possible. Granted these conditions, I think it probable that American business went further than was wise in trying to "share prosperity." I agree, in other words, not only with Marx on the Left, but with the conservative, orthodox, capitalist economists on the extreme Right, that the price of even temporary stability in big-scale, mass-producing, imperialistic finance-capitalism is a ruthless holding down of costs, including labour costs. This, as I see it, is one of the important reasons for insisting on a real system of private property, on a form of capitalism that is consistent with the common good.

is repeated. In the *Chicago Herald and Examiner* for March 16th, 1935, a letter from Mr. Hearst attacks the New Deal's attitude toward business, and then adds, "When we are tired of poverty, we will settle down to work again, I suppose, and laboriously build back to a condition of deplorable bourgeois wealth and general prosperity." Just how far back Mr. Hearst looks for his days of "general prosperity" is shown by the editorial page of that same paper, which carries in huge letters across the top of the page, "CALVIN COOLIDGE, PROSPERITY PRESIDENT, GREAT AMERICAN." Those who were rich during the 'twenties were so noisy about it, those who were poor were so still about it, that Mr. Hearst finds it easy to believe that all was rosy.

## 3

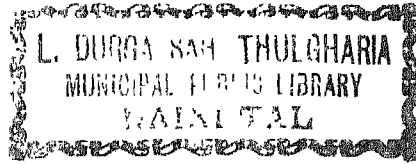
I have tried, in this section of my book, to describe how America got to her present state. My point can be summed up by returning to what I said about separating the national heroes from the national devils. I mentioned Jefferson and Lincoln as examples of the heroes—men who fought for the small-scale capitalism, the combination of economic and political democracy, that fits the American dream. I mentioned Rockefeller and Jay Gould as examples of the national devils—men who fought for the big-scale finance capitalism, the economic oligarchy plus the false forms of democracy, which would turn America into an unworthy copy of Great Britain. The century of progress has taken America further and further from the healthy kind of capitalism and tied her closer and closer to the diseased kind. All that the robber barons and the progress-mongers have succeeded in doing has been to take the British form of finance capitalism, to exaggerate it in keeping with America's

vast size, and to make it more savage in keeping with her lack of public morals.

Historic America, nevertheless, is still a live issue; it still has power over the American heart. Many Americans have betrayed it, for two reasons: first, they have been ignorant; they have not understood the economic drift. Second, they have been greedy; the men who urged them to the betrayal promised them many pieces of silver. I have tried to point out a few main features of the economic drift, and also to point out that the people have not been paid the pieces of silver. It would be heart-warming if Americans could refuse the bribe for the simple reason that they really care about America. But that may be asking too much from a nation without a religion; so it is worth remembering, and repeating, that they have not been paid the pieces of silver. Surely it is not worth betraying your country if all you get in return is an assurance from a Harvard professor that even if you seem to be hungry you are really better off than aristocrats used to be, and an assurance from the *Chicago Tribune* that even if you seem to be destitute your standard of living would have been the envy of the old kings of Europe?

America will have to choose, very soon, between the tradition of Jefferson and Lincoln and the tradition of Rockefeller and Gould. The former is American Culture. The latter is a debased form of the Civilization of the West. The former can have a proud future if Americans can make themselves good enough to deserve it. The latter is almost ready for the grave.

PART TWO  
AMERICAN CULTURE





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## CHAPTER FOUR

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### I

IN the public schools of Sheridan the children are made to learn and recite the following "American Creed":

I believe in the United States of America as a government of the people by the people for the people whose just powers are derived from the consent of the governed, a democracy in a republic, a sovereign nation of many sovereign states, a perfect union one and inseparable, established upon those principles of freedom, equality, justice, and humanity for which American patriots sacrificed their lives and fortunes. I therefore believe it is my duty to my country to love it, to support its constitution, to obey its laws, to respect its flag, and to defend it against all enemies.

This is an interesting creed. In the first place, it is put together out of thoughts and phrases from many of the great documents in American history: Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, Jefferson's Declaration of Independence, Madison's contributions to *The Federalist*, Webster's speeches. There is no doubt the creed is a fair statement of what many Americans want their country to be. In the second place, it contains a typical American sentimentality, a phrase preserved and honoured because it meant much in the past and in spite of the fact that it means nothing to-day: "a sovereign nation of many sovereign states." The phrase can reasonably be used to describe the original Confederation of thirteen states. But among the remaining thirty-five states at least thirty-one of them can never have been sovereign.

The word, as defined by *Webster's Dictionary*, means: "Independent of, and unlimited by any other; absolute in authority; as, a sovereign state." Has Iowa ever been "absolute in authority," and unlimited by any outside control? Has Kansas? Has Illinois? The ancestors of most of the children who learn this American Creed fought a four-years' war because the Southern States claimed the limited independence which would let them leave the Union in peace. It is ludicrous, after that, to keep talking about "sovereign states." Yet the phrase is cherished for sentimental reasons. The tendency to leave well-known words unexamined is a national trait of some importance in America.

Apart from this phrase, however, the American Creed is to the point. This is what most Americans profess. This is what many of them believe their country represents: democracy—an inseparable union—freedom—equality—justice—humanity. One side of the American problem can be put thus: will the people wake to reality in time to insist that the facts must conform to the ideal; or will they be content merely to cling to the words, to cling to them long after they have lost all meaning, to cling to them when freedom, equality, humanity, have become as inapplicable to American life as is the concept of "a sovereign nation of many sovereign states"?

The words, to-day, are in danger of becoming meaningless. If they do it will be the sign that American Culture has been defeated. If Americans could keep these words, these concepts, vivid in their minds, they would be a steady challenge, a reminder of how much there is still to be done before America can fulfil her dreams. But if Americans let the words grow slack and vague, then instead of being a challenge they become a soothing spell—something to mumble whenever there is danger of being forced to notice the truth.

For instance, on April 13th, 1935, Senator Robinson

of Arkansas,<sup>1</sup> stimulated by the fact that it was Jefferson's birthday, said that "personal liberty and equal rights for all citizens, freedom of speech, press, and religion are the cornerstones of our civilization." Senator Robinson is not content to say that these things are the ideal. He says quite bluntly that they *are* the cornerstones of the civilization. Now, Senator Robinson is one of the last men in America who ought to make that statement without qualification. For Senator Robinson comes from Arkansas, and there are things going on in Arkansas that Jefferson would not have taken to be illustrations of "personal liberty and equal rights."

Ever since the A.A.A. began putting cotton land out of production, the share-croppers<sup>2</sup> have become cheaper, and therefore more miserable, than ever. In Arkansas they are men who own nothing but their wretched clothes. They work a few acres on a huge tract of land. The landlord provides the acres to work, the tools, a team of mules, and a crazy shack to live in: unheated, unpainted, dilapidated, a rural slum. The share-cropper gets 50 per cent. of the crop, but at the end of a year of bitter work he is lucky if he comes out even, if he is free of debt so that he is allowed to take his worn-out wife and his rickety children and move to someone else's land where he can go through the dreary round again.

<sup>1</sup> A Southern State on the west bank of the Mississippi River, across from Tennessee.

<sup>2</sup> The share-cropper and the tenant-farmer have taken the place of the slave on the one-crop tobacco or cotton plantations of the South. The distinction between the tenant and the cropper is that the tenant furnishes tools, seed, work stock and the feed for his work stock, in addition to his own labour; whereas the cropper furnishes nothing but his labour. The tenant, at the end of the year, receives two-thirds to three-fourths of the crop; the share-cropper receives half the crop. More than 60 per cent. of the farmers in the ten cotton states are tenants or croppers, and in the tobacco districts the figures are only a little less depressing. The poorest peasant in France would look with loathing on the life of these people.



There is a poll tax of a dollar in Arkansas. It is payable in the spring, when the share-cropper is always penniless. This means that he is disfranchised unless the landlord is interested in a political campaign, in which case the landlord will pay the tax for all his share-croppers—and the share-croppers have about as free a vote as they would have in Hitler Germany.

Recently, when the share-croppers tried to better their state by organizing the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, masked night-raiders terrorized the union members and in many places free speech and free assembly were suspended. I do not say that the union organizers, and especially the professional agitators from the North, did not make nuisances of themselves in Arkansas. They were asking for trouble, and no one need wonder that they got it. But the plight of the share-cropper is none the less fearful. Senator Robinson should keep it in mind when he boasts about America.

The public is aware that Senator Robinson knows what goes on in his own state; therefore, when the Senator talks as if there were nothing wrong, as if the American dream had long ago been realized, the public merely becomes one point more cynical—which is not healthy. Senator Robinson should have learned that when good words are applied to bad conditions the words are debauched, the conditions are not helped in the least.

In an account of the Arkansas share-croppers the *New York Times* for April 15th, 1935, writes as follows:

Rarely does the credit advanced to the tenant by the landlord exceed one dollar an acre per month, and upon that method most of them live until they receive the first cash from their share of the crop next Fall. Under the crop-reduction programme those who have been lucky enough to "get a crop" for next year will have credit at the store ranging from ten dollars to twenty-five dollars a month.

Upon this credit allowance the share-cropper must pay his landlord interest which in many cases greatly exceeds 10 per

cent. He must buy his food and clothing at the only place where his credit is good with coupons torn from his "doodlum book," sometimes at a mark-up of from 10 to 25 per cent.

The share-cropper's credit is so meagre that it permits him only the bare necessities of life. He lives generally on a diet of corn bread, salt meat, and beans. Evidences of undernourishment and pellagra are apparent throughout the Cotton Belt, and North-eastern Arkansas is no exception.

Is this a picture of "personal liberty and equal rights for all citizens"? Does the treatment of the men who tried to form a share-croppers' union suggest that freedom of speech is one of "the cornerstones of our civilization"? Jefferson himself was too inclined to avert his eyes from facts that were uncomfortable, yet I think he would have hated to see his birthday commemorated with this speech of Senator Robinson's. For conditions in Arkansas would shock Jefferson to the edge of despair. He had seen city slums, and knew their horror; but he had never dreamed anything so ugly and unnatural as the rural slums of Arkansas. He always thought that at least the land would be a refuge for liberty, that the boundless American land assured a long future of freedom. If he were shown his South to-day, with its millions of share-croppers and tenant-farmers, Jefferson would love his country as much as ever, he would feel as sure as he used to feel that Providence had designed this land to be the home of a fortunate people.<sup>1</sup> But he would not talk as if the necessary work had already been done. He would not say, HOW lucky that these half-starved men and women have personal liberty and can make their own fate, how fine that these rickety children have equal rights with the richest children in the land, how encourag-

<sup>1</sup> The vicious conditions among the share-croppers of the cotton country in Arkansas are not typical of the whole South. Nevertheless, the lot of the cropper and the tenant-farmer is nowhere healthy; the conditions of his life are nowhere socially or morally desirable.

ing that these grim and angry landlords, these night-raiders, never interfere with anyone's freedom of speech.

It may seem unreasonable to complain because a politician talks pretty generalities on Jefferson's birthday. But Mr. Robinson is leader of the Democratic Party in the Senate. He has one of the most important positions an American can hold. And it is not good enough, these days, for a man in such a job to be content with moist words when the country is asking for realism. The American people are sickening for a little truth; they are ready to love the man who will talk to them honestly. They have heard, about a million times too often, that America is perfect; they are waiting for the man who can give them back their faith that America can still, some day, be good, can still become a proper subject for pride. But no man can revive the public's pride if he begins with lies, or if he begins with palaver. *Nothing is more enervating to the spirit than talk about "liberty," "rights," "freedom of speech,"* when the talk leads nowhere, is based on nothing, and merely serves to remind that audience that this is the kind of blabber a politician makes. The American people want to believe in those words. But the words have been spoiled by sloppy talkers. They cannot be freshened up again until some man learns to use them while keeping his eye on the facts.

Americans are dangerously cynical about their politics. They have had to listen to so much sentimental nonsense that they are ready to greet even the Lord's Prayer with a "So what?" When a man in high office is content to give them just another string of words to sneer at, that man is a danger to his country. There comes a point where cynicism must merge into despair, or else into a mood of such pressing need for faith that anything at all will be believed. Despair, or an orgy of what the Nazis call "thinking with the blood"—is it not a pretty

choice. And it is not a necessary choice unless America refuses, right up to the last moment, to face her problems fairly.

Mr. Sherwood Anderson, after much travelling through the country, has written as follows :

" If I could believe. I want belief." It is a kind of cry going up out of the American people. I think it is about the absolute net of what I have been able to find out about Americans in these last few years of travelling about, in all of this looking at people and talking to them.

" I want belief, some ground to stand on. I do not want government to go on being just a meaningless thing. I do not want life to be so stupid—so silly. . . ."

The outstanding dominant thing now in almost all of the Americans I have been seeing is this new thing, this cry out of their hearts for a new birth of belief.

I, too, have found this need all over America. It is both the hope and the danger. If Americans do not take advantage of it, if they do not give their people honest reasons for believing in America, for believing there is a way to make words like " liberty " and " equal rights " come true, the first thing they know the people may be believing in the Nordic Race.

Americans are ready for the best or for the worst things. The national mood was well expressed by Mr. William Allen White of Kansas, who said in a speech on April 17th, 1935, that " the old theories of life and the American tradition of life seem to be trembling. I am baffled, as you are, as everyone must be. I have been engaged for some time upon the life of Calvin Coolidge. I was interested to know that at the last he, too, threw up his hands. . . . The machine age has done something vital, something irreparable to the old life as it was. . . . I have no suggestions, but I do have faith in what might be called the subconscious common sense of Americans to solve that problem."

Here is an honest statement, and one that comes close to defining the average American view of politics in the spring of 1935. All over the continent men are feeling that "the old theories of life and the American tradition of life seem to be trembling." They are baffled. They feel vaguely that the problem has something to do with the machine age. And they have no suggestions. But they are waiting for suggestions. They are *not* waiting for soothing lies. They do not want to be told that nothing is wrong. They want a man who will admit, with them, that "the American tradition of life seems to be trembling," and who will then show them how it may be made strong. If they do not get such a man; if they get nothing but communists who say the American tradition is worthless, and "planners" who say it was all right once but will have to be remade to fit our day, and so-called conservatives who say there is nothing the matter with it at all—then the people will have no chance to save America. They will cling for a little longer to "what might be called the subconscious common sense of Americans"; then that, too, will go and they will be ready for the mob orator—no longer the Man on Horseback, but merely the Man behind the Microphone.

## 2

I have a friend in Los Angeles who joined the Communist Party because he could not find among orthodox groups the courage to admit the American problem, to define it, and to seek the American way out. He is one of the best of Americans, one of the people who should be the saviours of our Culture. Yet he has thrown it all overboard, and for reasons that cannot be belittled.

My friend (I shall call him Andrews) was born and raised on an Iowa farm. At the age of twenty-five he bought land in Kansas, where he farmed for the next

twenty years. At the end of that time his health was bad, so he sold his land and moved to Los Angeles, where he bought a garage with a well-equipped machine-shop, soon making himself into an expert motor mechanic. With two assistants he is still running the garage. He has made a good thing of it. In 1929 he thought himself almost rich; but the idea did not unbalance him. To-day he knows himself poor, but that does not bother him either. What does bother him is to hear that many of his old neighbours in Kansas are down and out, and to see the destitute all about him in California. For Andrews has a common-sense conviction that this misery is not necessary.

Andrews is the sort of man who tends to take action once his interest has been roused. He looks like Andrew Jackson—tall, thin, flat-chested, with high cheek-bones, indignant eyes, and a dour set to his mouth. In 1930 he began looking round to see which political party took the problems of to-day most seriously. He found the Republicans telling the nation that, little as it might look that way, America had the highest standard of living ever known. He found the Democrats telling the nation that the reason for the crisis was that there were too many Republicans in office. He found that the communists had been trying to do some thinking, that they had an analysis of how and why things had gone wrong, and a programme for putting them right. He found they had a moral passion that made him feel rejuvenated, reminding him of Bryan's campaign in 1896 when he had wept with impatience because he was a month too young to vote. So Andrews sat down, at the age of fifty-five, to study Marx.

Andrews is not a credulous man. He has the rural American's scepticism toward new-fangled notions. But he knows an honest conviction, so he knew that among all the politicians he saw and heard the com-

munists were the only ones with living faith. And they were the only ones whose comments on the world seemed to be related to a whole picture of society. So Andrews set himself to learn what that picture was, and to judge it for himself. When I met him, in the autumn of 1934, he had been puzzling over Marx for almost four years and he had just decided to join the Communist Party. He talked to me earnestly about Surplus Value, about Constant and Variable Capital and whether there was a tendency for the rate of profit to fall. It seemed to me he understood Marx better than most of my Left-Wing friends in New York and London, for each point as he grasped it was translated into terms of his own life. In his little machine-shop he was a capitalist; his two hired hands were the proletarian masses; the whole drama of nineteenth-century history was symbolized for Andrews in that garage. By thinking the thing through in his matter-of-fact way he had made the works of Marx come alive.

While talking to Andrews I was oppressed by the feeling that here was fine material going to waste. If America could not keep hold of a man like this for the defence of her institutions, whom could she hold? Andrews had been a free man all his life. Since leaving his father's farm he had never known a boss. He had always worked hard and worked creatively. He was exactly the type on which America's institutions must rest if they are to survive at all: a small property-owner, as simple a democrat as Lincoln, a man who would never take kindly to regimentation, a man who would never bother to keep a straight face if he were surrounded by the inflated pomp of fascism. Yet here he was, after years of thought, giving his allegiance to a group that would abolish the simple, friendly America in which he had been raised. When I said this to him, he replied that the America I was talking about had already been

abolished, and that he was merely trying to find something bearable to put in its place. Talking to Andrews I grew to hate all the liars and all the sentimentalists in high places who had given this honest man the feeling that no one any longer took America seriously.

Andrews is ahead of his time, but he is a sign of what will happen on a big scale in a few years unless American leaders do something to put heart into their natural allies. He probably represents something much better than what will happen, for Andrews is a man with character and with power of mind. Persuade him that America is sold out, and he turns to a system that does at least have thought content. But the millions who will soon become disaffected if the sort of thing that discouraged Andrews goes unchecked will not turn to anything so reasonable as the doctrines of Marx. They will turn to the first cheerful reformer who will promise them the moon.<sup>1</sup> And it will not be their fault. It will be the fault of the American leaders who have joined Senator Robinson in blandly repeating that theirs is a country of "personal liberty and equal rights," instead of following Mr. William Allen White in admitting that "the old theories of life and the American tradition of life seem to be trembling." On the basis of that honest statement the American tradition of life can still be saved. A big majority in the country—a majority, I think, in all classes throughout the country—want it to be saved. What can they do if their leaders keep telling them that it does not need saving—that fundamentally it is still quite sound, needing only a little tinkering here, a touch of "planning" there? They can do nothing except grow steadily more cynical and more disgusted, until they follow my friend Andrews in a revolt against the whole bag of tricks.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Upton Sinclair, for example, is the hero of the disillusioned in Andrews' own community.





## 3

The American—excluding perhaps the tabloid-fed masses in a few big cities—is not easily fooled. He will not take for ever a diet of soothing statements bearing no relation to what he sees about him. He will put up with a lot from politicians, for it has been the tradition since at least the time of his great grandparents that “government” is not only a nuisance, but an ass. There is, however, a limit, and at a time of real trouble like the present the politicians are wrong in thinking that the American is indifferent about all the nonsense that is handed him.

In the mountains of Eastern Kentucky there is an old farmer called Charlie Williams. Some years ago a railroad was built which passed about twenty miles from his farm. Charlie, having no occasion to travel such a distance, never saw it until last year. His two sons, living with him on the farm, had seen the railroad and talked about it, but it never occurred to Charlie to think they were telling the truth. Yet he did not bother to contradict them until one day their silly talk got on his nerves and he told them to stop lying.

“We’re not lying, Pa,” said the oldest son.

Such stubbornness roused Charlie’s opposition. The result was a wrangle and a bet. The next time they could spare the day they all three drove to the nearest point on the railway. From the top of a hill they could see a mile or so of track, and there on a siding was a freight train taking water.

“There she is, Pa,” said the boys in triumph.

The old man reined in his horse and sat for a few minutes watching. “Are you telling me that stove will run?” he asked at last.

“Sure she’ll run, Pa. Right along those tracks ahead of her.”

Charlie shook his head. "They'll never get her to run," he announced. Then there was silence while they all waited.

Finally "the stove" started up. No one said anything. The old man sat watching until the last car disappeared. Then he slapped his knee. "They'll never get her to stop," he said. That was the last word he ever spoke about the railroad.

Now, Charlie Williams, not being a traveller, might still be willing to believe that America is a land of "personal liberty and equal rights." There is plenty of those qualities in the world he sees round him. But try to convince Charlie that something is true when it seems to him fundamentally contradictory or confusing, and you will learn that he is one of the lucky men who find it easy to stay sceptical even after being told a thing three times. And in this he is typical of rural America.

The city man reads every morning and every evening in his newspapers about another "scientific revolution" and about some new mechanical marvels. All day long he is subjected to advertisements assuring him that the world is full of magic. And there is nothing in the daily routine of his life to bring him back to reality. In time he is ready to believe whatever he is told in a loud tone of voice. But the countryman still lives in a world which makes sense, the main events in which he thinks he can understand. So if he knows no basis in fact for what he is told, he will assume without difficulty that the teller is lying. But not so the city man, who has been taught to be broadminded. Tell the average city man that science has learned how to spray railroad trains with ultra-violet paint, thus making them invisible, and like as not he will believe you. After all, he has just been reading in his paper that astronomy has proved that the earth, as seen from Mars, looks bright blue; and on the way home from his office he has bought a loaf of radium-

bread to cure his sore stomach. His mind is not closed to new ideas. He may even believe what the next demagogue tells him. But the man who tries to persuade Charlie Williams, who has worked his land with some pains for sixty years, that "government" can make us all rich to-morrow—that man will have trouble on his hands.

Taking the country as a whole it is still true that Charlie Williams is more typical than the credulous city "slicker." And the Charlie Williamses (assuming they are not so down and out that they think it worth taking a try at *anything*) have a fine power of resistance to the miracle-man who promises everything and who, if asked to explain how his new world would work, merely screams a little louder. There are several such screamers in America to-day, each with his following; but the average American still laughs at them. In a few years' time, if the leaders have not reassured the people that the real American system is to be given a chance, the miracle-men will come into their own. People will begin to believe in them, not because they make sense, but because believing something is a normal state of the human mind. If America does not give her people a reasonable faith she cannot blame them for accepting whatever faith is offered.

So far, however, the Longs and Sinclairs and Father Coughlins are warnings of what may come rather than immediate threats. So far, the following pleasing comments by Mr. Don Marquis give the average American response to the wizard-note in politics: <sup>1</sup>

Alexander Hamilton [writes Mr. Marquis] according to the first text-book of American history which I studied, smote the rock of national resources and streams of credit gushed forth. Or maybe it was the other way about. Maybe he smote the rock of credit and national resources gushed forth. . . . That's what happens in finance and economics; you get hold of a

<sup>1</sup> *New York Herald Tribune*, April 27th, 1935.

wizard, and he smites something with something, and something gushes forth. If things get in a jam once more, you sign on another wizard, and he smites something with something, and all is well again. . . .

You can always get more money, or credit, or prosperity, or whatever you want, if you employ enough wizards. They will smite something with something and something will gush forth. . . . There are times when to examine the process too critically almost verges on the irreligious—for this is no common or mundane process to be criticized by ordinary worldlings. There are the prophets, smiting vigorously in every direction. If you don't believe in them firmly enough, and in their superhuman powers, you are not worthy to have anything gush forth; so if it doesn't gush forth it is your own fault for being sceptical.

The strength of America lies in the large group of people whose feelings Mr. Marquis is here expressing—people who still expect their wizards to make sense. The danger to America is that these people may all be driven into opposition, like my friend Andrews, before the leaders will admit that America needs something more than a new period of prosperity—that America needs to win back a way of life with which she can save her soul.

Speaking at the Harvard Club in New York on April 23rd, 1935,<sup>1</sup> Judge John C. Knox of the United States District Court made the flamboyant statement that there is real danger that the American "system will be scattered to the wrathful winds of an outraged people." Judge Knox is mistaken if he thinks the people are outraged at the American system. They are not. They are outraged at the intellectual shabbiness of their leaders.

Mr. Hoover writes a book on the need for rugged individualism. Then he wanders about the country crying that we must save the constitution. The people are not fooled. They have heard these cries before.

<sup>1</sup> I quote from the account in the *Herald Tribune* of April 24th.

They recognize them as the noise of a politician out of office. They remember what individualism and the constitution meant when Mr. Hoover was President. They even remember what the words meant in the good old days when Mr. Hoover (with no apparent pain of conscience) sat in Harding's Cabinet. The words themselves are no longer good enough. The people are asking that someone put thought content into them. And that is a job for a brighter man than Mr. Hoover.

And then Mr. Tugwell writes a book. There is much talk about saving democracy and about the native American system. And there is even more talk about a planned economy. But there is no explanation of how a planned economy, if adequately planned and administered, can be anything but a tyrant state—anything but the direct opposite of democracy and the native American system. And again the people are not fooled. Again they know that good words are being used purely for their sound-value. And again they say, "Baloney." That, at the moment, is America's comment on her politics. From coast to coast I have heard it applied to the leaders and to all their schemes. Hoover? "Baloney." The Brain Trust? "Baloney." Borah? "Baloney." Huey Long? "Baloney."<sup>1</sup>

A shrewd British commentator on modern America has written as follows: "Some very deep and dangerous ill assails us when we feel that our country has failed to come within reasonable distance of our personal ideals; and that ill is very prevalent in America to-day."<sup>2</sup> It is indeed prevalent. It is the national disease. It may take the form of cynicism, or the form of hopelessness,

<sup>1</sup> I have not yet heard "Baloney" to President Roosevelt. In New England the gentry calls him briefer and more pungent names. But over most of the country there is still—even among his enemies—an inclination to wait and see.

<sup>2</sup> *America in Search of a Culture*. By William Aylott Orton.

or the form of revolt (as in the case of Andrews) against the whole tradition. And so far as the harm done to America is concerned, all three forms are about equal.

If the American experiment should fail on account of what Judge Knox, in his Harvard Club speech, called "the ground-swell of public discontent that threatens to engulf the country"—if this should happen it would not mean that the people were sick of the experiment. It would mean they were sick of their leaders. It would mean they had given up hope of finding men who could do anything for America's institutions except take names in vain. The American people believe in their institutions. They believe in that Creed which the school-children of Sheridan recite. But they are not so brute-stupid as to believe the Creed describes the country that now exists. They know it describes the country of their dream, and they would give their lives to the man who could convince them he knew how the dream might be made true. But every time a politician is content to say the dream is now a reality, that politician is undermining America. He is making the Left-Wing case against the country seem unanswerable. By his cowardice of mind he is giving away the game.

The people are waiting for a politician who will dare admit that of course America has gone far wrong, that of course the world of to-day is a parody of the American dream, but who will also dare believe that America could still come true. They will not wait much longer, for they have begun to doubt the possibility of such a man. They have begun to doubt everything they hear from high places. If the country is overthrown, it will not be by violence but by "baloney."

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## CHAPTER FIVE

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### I

A RECENT British visitor, Mr. Macdonell, wrote an article about the Middle West. He told of a Nebraska farmer (a man from the commercial crop, get-rich-quick section of the farm population), who said it was a relief to him and to most of his friends to know that the days of easy fortunes are gone for ever. In the future, he said, the American farmer will find it casier to remember one basic fact: that farming is not a job for a few years and a quick clean-up, but a way of life; not a pleasant interlude for a man who is gambling on the stock-exchange or betting on the price of land, but a profession with an infinitely varied technique that cannot be mastered in one life-time. And having learned that lesson, said the Nebraskan to Mr. Macdonell, nothing, not even "government," can keep the farmer from making himself a good life.

I have heard that same story myself, over and over, these past two years. I heard it especially often in Iowa, which of all the great agricultural states was the one where the farmers felt themselves the merest transients, using the land for a few years until the chance came to sell it high and move to Southern California. The strange fact is that since this get-rich-quick chance has been wiped out men have not felt discouraged, they have felt rested. The peace-destroying American pressure to "make something of yourself" has been relaxed; and instead of hating their land now that they are forced to admit it is made up of farms and not of gold-mines, these men and women are just beginning to love it.

They are beginning to think of settling down as a Southerner settles (when he has half a chance), with no thought that he or his descendants are likely to move for centuries.

With this settling down there comes the hope of a Culture. The nomad is either a savage or else the product of a Civilization. Only the Culture-man has a home. *Ubi bene, ibi patria*—that is the boast of the “civilized” man as it is the practice of the wandering hunter. But between those two—between the vagrant Indian and the vagrant New Yorker—lies the life in which a Culture is possible. And that life is still built round the home. And the men who live that life will have two peculiarities: they will know that there are plenty of things in the world worth fighting for, and they will not be contemptuous of the land.

After telling of the Nebraska farmer Mr. Macdonell ends his article as follows:

I motored home that evening feeling profoundly convinced that I had seen something of the real heart of America, something that we in Europe and many people in the East of the United States know very little about. For the next few days I asked the same question of other Nebraska farmers, and got substantially the same answer. . . . I believe that in the Middle West there is something that is completely invincible—a rich land and an indomitable people. Whatever panic the cities may let themselves be stampeded into, whatever fantastic nonsense may be evolved by wild Governors or would-be Governors, the Middle West<sup>1</sup> will go steadily on its way, and in the end it will take the rest of the United States with it.

<sup>1</sup> The Middle West is an elastic term. Mr. Macdonell is using it as I use it throughout this book, in its broadest sense. In this sense the name refers to most of the northern half of the Mississippi Valley—north of the Ohio River in the East, north of Arkansas and Oklahoma in the West. So defined, there are five Middle Western states east of the Mississippi and seven to the west. Three of the states to the east of the River (Ohio, Michigan, Illinois) are as important to industry as to agriculture; for the rest, the farm dominates the Middle Western economy. It is the



If Mr. Macdonell knew America better, I think he would substitute the whole Mississippi Valley for the Middle West in his last sentence. Or perhaps the correct substitution would be "rural America"; for if the United States is to "go steadily on her way," if she is to prove invincible in the sense that she cannot even be destroyed by her own vices, she will need the help of every man and woman who can picture a good life in more interesting terms than a steadily increasing income. There are plenty of such people in the villages and farms of New England. And rural Pennsylvania—especially the country west of Philadelphia, round about Lancaster and York—is perhaps the one part of America outside the South where such people have always set the tone of life.

This conflict between "getting ahead" and leading a good life, between doing and being, is basic to the problem of American Culture. America can hardly be blamed for having succumbed to a bad form of the nineteenth-century mania for getting ahead. There was so much to be done on the continent, the stakes were so high and the doing was often so romantic and exciting, that only saintliness or an inhuman wisdom could have kept America from giving too much respect and too much praise to the mere process of change. It became part of the national character to measure life in terms of "improving your circumstances," or of "getting somewhere in the world." The dynamic force of a whole nation intent on "getting somewhere" whirled America in a few years from the frontier to the world city. At least it whirled many Americans between those two extremes, leaving them in the grim plight I spoke of in

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corn-, wheat-, and hog-raising section of America, though in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota potatoes are also an important crop. In 1930 the population of these twelve states was about thirty-eight and a half millions.

my Introduction, the plight of people who are old without ever having been young.

It is natural that this should have happened to a large part of America; the surprising thing is that another large part has resisted the inane flight through time, has tried to dig in, to grow roots, to establish a local life, to lay the foundations for American Culture. For a long time these people, if they were noticed at all, were laughed at; but the last six years have given them a new prestige. An important question for America is this: how far is the change of heart genuine? How far are Americans prepared to take seriously the ideal of *being* something, instead of making a loud noise? How far do the Nebraska and Iowa farmers who now talk happily of having learned that farming is a way of life—how far do they mean it? If the chance came again would they really resist the temptation to become land-gamblers? If they do mean it, if they would resist the temptation, if they are honestly thinking in terms of the quality of their lives and not in terms of how far “up” they have come in the world, then American Culture can be a reality.

Parallel to the conversion of the Nebraska and Iowa farmers to the thought that farming is not a get-rich-quick game—that it is something to settle down to in the hope that by the time your grandchildren have grown up they may be fairly good at it—parallel to this there are signs of the conversion of the intellectual class in the Mississippi Valley to the idea that if America is to have a Culture of her own the intellectuals had better stay at home and take part in that Culture instead of streaming to New York and becoming good little copies of an alien Civilization. This conversion, or the beginning of this conversion, is one of the important events in American history. Without it there could have been no future for native American life.

In a country the size of England (which has about the same area as Illinois) it may not be fatal to have a so-called "intellectual capital" toward which the brains and ambition of the whole country tend to drift. An Englishman in London can never be more than a few hours away from his home; so he can be a Londoner and still keep in touch with the life that bred him. But an American in New York is just as likely to be a few *days* from his home. Also, an American moving to New York may have to transfer himself not only through hundreds or thousands of miles of space, but through centuries of time. To move from Nashville<sup>1</sup> (from the Southern Culture of America), or from Indianapolis<sup>2</sup> (from the Middle Western Culture) to New York (to the generalized Civilization of the whole Western world) is to make a move that is perilous to the soul. It is to tear up strong roots and plant puny ones. It is to leave a home where the spirit can grow in depth and intensity, and to join what Spengler calls "the mass of tenants and bed-occupiers in the sea of houses."

In England the man who makes such a move is at least not cut off from his background. He has come from an "old" countryside and he has moved to an "old" metropolis. The change may not have been wise, but at any rate the man has not moved to a foreign land. But the man from Nashville or Indianapolis who moves to New York has done exactly that. He has left a

<sup>1</sup> Nashville is the capital of the State of Tennessee. The population in 1930 was 154,000. Nashville is the centre for a group of the most distinguished younger writers in America—historians, novelists, poets, publicists.

<sup>2</sup> Indianapolis is the capital of the State of Indiana. The population in 1930 was 364,000. Some of the most interesting of the older generation of American writers live in Indianapolis—Booth Tarkington being perhaps the best known to the world at large. Among the moderate-sized cities of the Middle West, Indianapolis has been notably successful in keeping the friendliness and individuality of a small town.

Culture and moved to a Civilization, left a world of growing significance and moved to a world whose meanings are fixed and petrified.

The country town is still rooted to the land about it. The relation between town and countryside is still organic. But the world-city is rooted in high finance—the most abstract and inhuman of man's devices. There is no warmth for the soul, no wisdom for the mind. The Culture-man is lost in such a steel-and-concrete desert. He may be fascinated; he may never leave; for the desert has a wicked beauty. But there is no living bond between him and the world about him. This becomes painfully clear in the case of an artist. There is nothing he can mean in a world-city, nothing he can express. As a creative artist he is washed out; he usually ends as a critic, a dilettante, or a social revolutionary.

The chief harm, however, is not what happens to the Culture-man who moves to the world-city; the chief harm is what happens to the Culture he leaves behind him. If all the more eager, or the more forceful, young men and women leave the country towns and drain into New York, they not only come to no important end themselves, but they impoverish the local Culture. And on that local Culture the hope of America rests. If she becomes a nation whose best creative spirits want nothing so much as to be critics or novelists in a world-city, she has become nothing at all. If she becomes a nation whose best creative spirits are proud of their local life and want to help it grow in strength and subtlety, then she will have a Culture. She will have a youth and a middle age. She will take her part in history.

Indianapolis is one of the few cities which has managed to keep her successful literary men at home; but these were older men, and their good example had no effect on the youth of the post-war years when the current setting toward New York became a racing tide. Before

that tide could turn it was necessary for some young men who had been successful in the world-cities, who had shown they could play that game smartly, to return to their own sections on the ground that there was a richer and more sustaining life in the country towns than in the giant capitals. The men who set the fashion had to be successful, so that it could not seem a matter of sour grapes; and they had to be young, so that no one should say they were only leaving the world-cities when their own pulses began to run slow.

In the past few years this example has been given by a group of Southerners. It was natural the movement should start in the South, for Southern Culture has been deeper and more self-conscious than that of any other section. Many able Southerners had never accepted the doctrine of "getting ahead," the naïve theory that the main business of life was to "improve your circumstances." Among all the good things the South has done for America, in the long run she may be proudest of her resistance to this lying creed. The resistance, of course, has been anything but complete. But the fact that it has been made at all is notable, and is at last beginning to have weighty influence.

In the late 1920's, when the Southern literary secession from cosmopolitan America first became important enough to draw attention, there was laughter in New York, and one group of the Southerners was condescendingly called the "Young Confederates." These youths were said to be retreating from the harsh beauty of modern life, seeking refuge among the romantic memories of their forefathers. In fact they were withdrawing from one of the biggest frauds in history—from "Coolidge prosperity" and from all the values, spiritual and physical, of that dreary time. They were withdrawing from American Civilization in the days before that Civilization had sprung a leak, when it still seemed to be

riding high. They were withdrawing into American Culture. So far from seeking a moonlit past, they were the one group in those days who dared bet on America's future. They believed in their country. They believed that its life was good, and that by taking part in it they could both live better themselves and also help to advance the day when the real America should stand out above the colonial.

Among "civilized" New Yorkers—and especially among those associated with "the backbone of our society"—it is not uncommon to talk of a trip west of the Alleghanies (and short of the Sierras) as "visiting America." I recently heard a New York friend telling of such an adventure.

"I've just come back from America," he said with quiet pride. "I was out there for two weeks. And, my dear, the hardships: The languages—and the local customs—it was too debilitating."

Well—the Young Confederates came to much the same conclusion about the relation between New York and the Mississippi Valley. Only they did not find America "too debilitating." They found it a more life-giving place than New York. As a result of their secession from the world-city there are now four or five country towns in the South where the local life is richer, where American Culture is closer to defining itself, where a real future for the country has come to seem more plausible.

There is only one sense in which these Southerners can be said to have retreated into memories of their forefathers: they have affirmed both in their works and in their actions that the American dream cannot come true unless Americans are willing to lead lives compatible with such a dream, that the nation cannot model itself on the cosmopolitan plutocrat and at the same time expect America to become a democracy of free and equal men.

They have seen, in other words, that America must choose between her two sets of national heroes—and they have rejected the set that is typified by Jay Gould. Having made that choice, they have naturally become more and more influenced, more and more helped, by the wisdom and example of the men who make up the other set of heroes. Precisely because they believe in a future for the real America they are able to get strength from the American past. If this be sentimentality, may the Lord help the unsentimental.

I have used the term, Southern Culture, which hostile critics identify with over-romanticized pictures of life on the old plantations. But what I mean, specifically, is a certain way of feeling about life—a way which is only dominant in societies that have had long contact with the land. As I have pointed out, there are millions of poor farmers in the South to-day, who get nothing from the land but degradation of soul and body. They will never get anything better unless they become free farmers, genuine owners, once again. Unless this is done, the Southern Culture, which was not exterminated even by the Civil War, will soon have vanished. But it has not vanished yet. Its characteristic note is heard in the writings of the Nashville group to which I have referred—a group which may represent the last challenge of the land to the world of paper “property.” Perhaps a few brief quotations will suggest what I mean.

Mr. John Crowe Ransom writes :

It is only too easy to define the malignant meaning of industrialism. It is the contemporary form of pioneering; yet since it never consents to define its goal, it is a pioneering on principle, and with an accelerated speed. Industrialism is a programme under which men, using the latest scientific paraphernalia, sacrifice comfort, leisure, and the enjoyment of life to win Pyrrhic victories from nature at points of no strategic importance. Ruskin and Carlyle feared it nearly a hundred

years ago, and now it may be said that their fears have been realized partly in England, and with almost fatal completeness in America. Industrialism is an insidious spirit, full of false promises and generally fatal to establishments, since, when it once gets into them for a little renovation, it proposes never again to leave them in peace. Industrialism is rightfully a menial, of almost miraculous cunning but no intelligence; it needs to be strongly governed or it will destroy the economy of the household. Only a community of tough conservative habit can master it.

Mr. Andrew Lytle writes :

We have been taught by Jefferson's struggles with Hamilton, by Calhoun's with Webster, and in the woods as Shiloh or along the ravines at Fort Donelson where the long hunter's rifle spoke defiance to the more accelerated Springfields, that the triumph of industry, commerce, trade, brings misfortune to those who live on the land.

Mr. Donald Davidson writes, of the American effort to create a Culture by buying pictures, building museums, endowing ever more enormous universities :

What a shame if, with all this tremendous array of compulsions, the stubborn pig still refuses to get over the stile! Yet that is what happens. The arts behave with piggish contrariness. They will not budge, or they run crazily off into briar patches and mud puddles, squealing hideously.

The movement begun by the young Southerners has spread during the past few years. But just as there must be some doubt as to how thorough is the conversion of the Nebraska and Iowa farmers, since the conversion took place after their land ceased being a good gamble, so there must be a little question about some of the people who have recently spurned New York.

In September, 1934, a magazine called *The Midwest* was founded. It tried to assert the same concern for local Culture, for the reality of American life, that the Southerners had asserted. But instead of having lived



through, and thus seen through, the pretensions of Civilization in America, the editors of *The Midwest* seemed to be merely angry at New York. Instead of having succeeded in the cosmopolitan centres and having found such success not good enough, the editors of *The Midwest* seemed to feel their lack of recognition was a conspiracy on the part of the East.

What this country really needs [says *The Midwest* editorially], is a few authors content to live among the people about whom they write. . . . Art capitals are inevitably enervating places. They give very little for what they demand. . . . There is no substance, no weight, no real life in such places.

This is true ; but as the editorial goes on to characterize New York, the East in general, and the Midwestern authors who have moved to the East, it becomes clear that the emotions lying behind these moral statements are complicated, and not wholly beautiful. The language breaks down under the rage.

Daily the East becomes more and more insufferable [says *The Midwest*], in its assumptions that its own manner is right, that all others are wrong. The East is provincial to the core. And perhaps we should not care were it not so dogmatic and so intolerant in its provincialism. . . . They (*i.e.*, Midwestern authors who have moved east) may bask in the doubtful glory of belonging to the intellectual capitals of the world, but they have really done little more than become intellectual snobs, their minds as dry and brittle as the back-scratching pap upon which they feed and are fed. . . . American letters stand at the cross-roads to-day, while these bored Middle-Westerners desiccated by the East still utter their sophomoric addenda to the moribund Debunking Age. . . . We are tired of replenishing an arrogant Manhattan with live talent which it soon teaches to sneer at its own parents. . . . Let the East commit its own literary suicide. . . . We shall never have our due until we strike an attitude . . . convincing enough to demand respect and command acknowledgment.

"Strike an attitude" is an unfortunate phrase. It seems to describe the tone of the whole editorial, which is too melodramatic to be taken quite seriously even if the use of English were more expert. Yet the ideas deserve attention. They are an awkward attempt to assert the importance to America of her native Culture, the triviality of her imitative Civilization. Unfortunately, the anger suggests that the Culture is envying the Civilization. In that case the game is up, the pass is already sold. If the Civilization is envied, if the Culture-man feels angry because he is not a part of it rather than concerned lest the wretched thing should spread, then the Culture-man is on the way out. For under those conditions every man of ability throughout the nation will make his way to one of the great cities, and every man of dominant ability will make his way to New York. Instead of the living relationship between countryside and small town, where each is complementary to the other, there comes the ruinous relation of world-city and "province," where one is the centre of hopes and ambitions and the other is simply the wilderness where people who could not "make the grade" are compelled to live.

The editors of *The Midwest* illustrate the critical position in which many Americans in the Mississippi Valley now find themselves. Will these young editors be able to make good their attempt to play the part of Culture-men, seeking to protect their region from the contagion of cosmopolitan, colonial America? Or will they merely become provincials, accepting so far as their emotions go the standards of the big city, but railing against those standards in the hope of keeping up their self-respect? The difference between these two views is the difference between *The Midwest* with its shrill lack of self-confidence, and *I'll Take My Stand*, a book by the so-called Young Confederates. These Southerners show no trace of envy for New York. They have compared American

Civilization with American Culture and learned that they can only be satisfied with the latter. Mr. Andrew Lytle, in his chapter of *I'll Take My Stand*, tells a story of long ago to show the firm basis to life which a Culture affords—and which these Southerners, living in the real America, know we could still recapture if we would make up our minds that our country is worth saving.

When Van Buren was President, according to Mr. Lytle, he made a speech in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. At the end of the speech a rich planter led one of his tenants, named Abner, up to meet the President.

Abner stepped up with perfect composure, pressed His Excellency's hand deliberately down, and said in a calm, even tone:

"Mr. Buren, the next time you come down here I want you to come out my way and ra'r around some with us boys."

This man worked a little truck patch on somebody else's land; hunted at night for pelts; fished in Stone's River; and ra'ed around when he was a mind to. He possessed nature as little as possible, but he enjoyed it a great deal, so well that he felt the President might be satisfied with what hospitality he had to offer. Whenever a society has at its base people so contented with their lot, it may not be perfectly ideal, but it is the best politicians will ever effect and maintain.

The Southerners know that their world, still favourably divided between country-side and small towns, and with a tradition of a good life, could easily be transformed so that men like Abner would again become a common product. They know that no revolution, no reformation, nothing but a second Flood, could make such men a possibility in a world-city. So they do not feel envious of New York, or inferior *vis-à-vis* New York. Quite the reverse. A great deal will depend, in the critical decade on which America is entering, on whether the representatives of Culture all through the country can take the firm self-confident attitude of this group of

Southerners, or whether they will share the half-frightened ill temper of the editors of *The Midwest*.

## 2

The barbarity that must result from judging life in terms of activity, in terms of how much has been done, is shown in the following quotation from an interview with Mr. Daniel Willard, President of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad.<sup>1</sup> "It means something," said Mr. Willard, "in terms of national welfare to say that in good times and in bad, in wartime as in peacetime, we Americans can and do travel more miles per capita, and move more goods more miles, than the people of any other country on earth. . . . But before the invention of the steam locomotive, Americans in general probably did not travel so far in their lifetimes as we now average in a week, possibly in a day. And certainly they did not move as much freight as far in a year as we move in a day."

Here is a brief but thorough picture of the lamentable side of the American mind. It is suggested that Americans are better than foreigners, not because of any quality in the national life, but because "we move more goods more miles" than they do. It is suggested that modern Americans are better than their ancestors, not because of an increase in grace or wisdom, but because "certainly they did not move as much freight as far in a year as we move in a day." Perhaps, in the happy hours when they were not moving all that freight, the ancestors found time for a little thought.

The following remarks by Mr. Arthur Brisbane<sup>2</sup> give another example of this tawdry side of the American mind. Mr. Brisbane was defending the town of Pittsburgh which he says "represents the industrial genius of

<sup>1</sup> *Saturday Evening Post*, November 3rd, 1934.

<sup>2</sup> Editorial writer and trained seal for the Hearst press.

America, the genius that has *made* America." He concluded as follows: "Without that mass production, well named, the masses would have nothing. To mass production they owe their automobiles, electric washers, bath tubs, radio sets, everything that makes them unlike the French peasant before the revolution."

Mr. Brisbane, in his queer way, is really saying that America amounts to nothing. The only thing that distinguished Americans from the peasants before the French Revolution (who do not seem to be mentioned with admiration or respect) is the possession of some mechanical devices. Take away the devices, put the American back in the environment of Abraham Lincoln, and he would be nothing.

Of course, Mr. Brisbane does not really mean this. At least, he would not like to mean it if he could help it. But in order to help it he will have to find some other test of value than the quantity of machinery that is lying about. He will have to start thinking in terms of an American Culture. And if he ever did that he would find it not quite so easy to say that Pittsburg represents "the genius that has *made* America."

To quote Mr. Orton once more: "Not even yet can Americans bring themselves consciously to admit . . . that the general direction of their cultural life since, roughly, the Civil War, has been diametrically hostile to the spiritual values they cherish no less than other peoples." Pittsburg is a good symbol for the genius that has made this evil "general direction of our cultural life." But if Mr. Brisbane is honestly looking for "the genius that has *made* America"—the real America, the America that does still cherish spiritual values and does not yet judge all life in terms of electric washers and radio sets—he will have to go farther back than Pittsburg and quite outside the circle of the steel kings. The first American to visit that fork of the Allegheny and Monon-

gahela Rivers, where Pittsburg stands, was George Washington. There are still a great many Americans who intend that when their country is finally "made" it will be on patterns closer to those of Washington than to those of the Mellon family.

Nevertheless, Mr. Willard and Mr. Brisbane show an important trend. In an effort to excuse the chief national failing they have tried to make a virtue of it. They have told themselves that the concern with "getting ahead," the childish emphasis on financial success, is but one side of the American feeling that all men are created equal. Americans, they say, are too proud, too free, to accept a semi-permanent status. A man may be very poor this year, but there is always the chance that next year he may be very rich. So he does not need to feel himself one of the "lower orders," to feel inferior to the man who happens to be very rich this year but who may well be very poor next year. If Americans stopped feeling it was their duty to get ahead, if they began to accept the station in life to which it had pleased God to call them, society would soon be divided into social classes of a fairly rigid order and American equality would be dead. So runs the fairy-story Americans have learned to repeat, as an excuse for their tendency to feel that a man's time is misspent unless he is doing all he can to "better himself." But the fairy-story is nonsense.

The one social institution which begets equality is the institution of private property. A nation where ownership is widespread will be a nation where equality is a simple and natural fact. A nation where ownership is concentrated in a few hands—whether they be the hands of great landlords or great financiers—will be a nation on its way toward a rigid class system. American equality is still real because it is only a little more than a generation since the "little man" was a common unit of ownership. So far from being dependent on get-rich-

quick tendencies, American equality is in danger of being killed by them.

In France there is at least as much equality as in America, and in France it is in no danger of dying out. For the French are still for the most part a nation of property-owners, and hence of free men. The French instinct for property is more real, more effective, than the American. Americans have an instinct for aggrandisement, for "getting somewhere," quite as much as an instinct for property. If an American inherits a little grocery shop in a small town, he is unlikely to be content with his lot. He will feel—and his neighbours will encourage him to feel—that he ought to "get somewhere." He will probably try to turn his small shop into a big shop, perhaps into a department store, perhaps into a chain of stores. One of two things will happen. He may fail, in which case he will cease being a property-owner. He will go on a wage or a dole and America will be the poorer by one free man. Or else he may succeed, he may set up his department store or his chain of stores, in which case America will be the poorer by many free men. For it is not possible to erect one giant business except at the cost of many little businesses. It is not possible for one man to "get somewhere" in the inflated American sense without insuring that some other men get nowhere at all.<sup>1</sup>

This is an example in small terms of the difference between private enterprise and private property—a difference which, as the American Fathers warned, cannot safely be ignored. In France the instinct for property is strong enough to impose a restraint on enterprise. Enterprise is seldom allowed to destroy the basic

<sup>1</sup> The successful man may "make jobs" for many others—but he will also dispossess them in the process. Between 1930 and 1932, 578,000 "little men," in industry, shop-keeping and the professions, were driven out of business. *This represented one-sixth of the small private enterprises in the United States.*

forms of property—the small farm and the small shop. But over large parts of America this relationship is reversed. Americans speak highly of property, but the thing they really enjoy is freedom of enterprise. In the name of enterprise they have been willing to see the small property-owner destroyed. There has, of course, been a strong protest against this destruction. The American instinct for property is lively; there is room to hope it may soon assert itself at the expense of unlimited enterprise; but so far it has not succeeded in doing so. So far it is true that while France has kept a stable basis for a free society by clinging to real private property, America has endangered the stable basis which her fathers bequeathed her by clinging to private enterprise.

This difference between the two peoples explains one frequent source of Franco-American misunderstanding. I have heard Americans talk with exasperated bitterness about the French accusation that America is money-mad. "Compared to the French we care *nothing* for money," is the burden of these complaints. "We splash our money about carelessly; the Frenchman protects each sou as if it were blood from his heart." And I have heard my French friends talk with equal bitterness on the other side. That Americans should accuse the French of parsimony—that they should not know the difference between avarice and a decent thrift—that is too stupid.

The explanation of these cross-purposes is simple. The Frenchman does not understand the seething of material ambition in America, the social pressure upon every man to "get ahead." Therefore, as the Frenchman watches the American melodrama of private enterprise he can ascribe no motive to it but the most sordid money-greed. Conversely, the American does not understand the Frenchman's passion for holding on to his property—his farm, his shop, his little business.



Not having understood, as yet, the lesson taught by the American Fathers—that small property is the basis for freedom—Americans watch the Frenchman saving his pennies, turning his back on chances to cash in quickly at the risk of losing everything, and it seems to them he must be a petty miser.

Two years ago I spent Easter-week in a hotel in Nîmes. Having some articles to write, I was working on them one morning on the balcony outside my room when the waiter came to clear away the breakfast things. Hearing the typewriter, he strolled out on to the balcony. After watching for a moment he asked if I was a journalist. I said yes. He asked where. I said London.

“But aren’t you an American?”

“Yes.”

He seemed to think it *formidable* that an American journalist in London should write his articles in Nîmes. So he sat down on the balcony-railing to ask questions. We were soon talking politics, he putting me at my ease about my peculiar French and pumping me on the strange doings of *le Ramsay MacDonald*.

No one could have been less constrained than this French waiter, no one could have talked more easily as equal to equal. Had he been an Englishman he would have stood up, and larded his sentences with “sirs.” As a Frenchman he sat on my balcony and played the affable host to a foreigner who was awkward with his language. His father, he told me, had a little farm on the road to Montpellier. He himself was a good farmer; but his father was young; it would be many years before he would inherit; and the farm was tiny. So he had come to town and learned a new job. But the farm was always in the background. The farm, in the end, would be the centre of his life; meanwhile it gave him the dignity and ease of a proprietor.

His uncle, I learned, had a tobacco shop. His uncle’s

son had done something unheard of in the family—and was not, it seemed, altogether approved. He had gone into the merchant marine, was a steward on a boat that ran from Marseilles to the East.

I asked what was wrong with that.

My friend shook his head. If the father (who was frail) should die, it might be months before the boy could get home. Meanwhile what of the shop? Could the widow—a notoriously bad business woman—keep it up properly until her son got home? It was clear that the family suspected the young man of a lack of responsibility. He was an only child, and it did not seem safe that he should go so far away from the family property.

*Is this money-grubbing? I do not think so.* This is a fierce instinct for preserving the freedom that the French peasant won at some cost to himself and to the rest of Europe. In America freedom was more easily come by, which may be why the people tend to take it lightly. By the time they have had to win it back again they may look after it with more vigilance.

I said there was reason to hope that the property-instinct in America might at last prove strong enough to restrain the instinct for unlimited private enterprise. The two instincts can work in harmony, but only when people see that in order to save property, enterprise must be kept within bounds. The American people are beginning to see this. As I said before, I found farmers in Iowa who were glad to have discovered that their farms were not gold-mines, who were rested and relaxed at the thought of settling down to a modest way of life, in country they loved, and where they now expected to spend the rest of their days. They were a little hesitant about expressing their relief, for they felt it might be un-American. They felt I might be shocked that they did not plan to pyramid their holdings year by year until they were either rich or ruined.

And I have talked to many shopkeepers and artisans who took the same view. If we ever get another chance, they said, we won't splurge, we won't shoot the moon, we'll try to build ourselves a little business and hang on to it. It sounds dull, put that way. But it is not dull, for it means choosing the creative life instead of the gambling life. It means choosing the little business not because it is little, but because it is something of your own, something you have a good chance of keeping all your life and of passing on to your children. It means deciding that art, that creation, is more interesting than roulette. It means choosing relative stability, choosing the sort of world in which a man can look forward to bringing up a family.

In the past the efforts Americans have made to discourage great accumulations of property have come to nothing. This is because their wills have been divided. In so far as the average man pictures himself as being squeezed out, dispossessed by the huge combines, he is, of course, against them. But in so far as he pictures himself as some day forming one of these combines, or even as making a lucky killing out of the stock of one of these combines, he has been in favour of them. So the war on "bigness," the war to protect small property, has been in part a sham war.<sup>1</sup> But that situation is changing, and the change will become complete if the American people are brought to see that small property is the basis for all their cherished institutions. The war

<sup>1</sup> The two chief episodes in this war, in modern times, are the Populist Movement, culminating in Bryan's unsuccessful campaign for the Presidency in 1896, and the Progressive Movement which led to the election of Theodore Roosevelt in 1904 and Woodrow Wilson in 1912. These Movements resulted in trust-busting laws which were never made strong enough to be effective, and in laws to secure a more perfect democracy by putting more political power into the hands of the people. These latter laws proved once again that the form of political power without the reality of economic power is a fraud.

on the undesirable aspects of Big Business, the war on expropriation, can be won the minute the attacking army makes up its mind to succeed.

Many observers are telling us to-day that the American faith in democracy is dead. Even so able a journalist as Mr. Raymond Gram Swing writes, in *Forerunners of American Fascism* :

Waging war on professors, contemptuous of academic freedom and of the rights of free speech, hostile to the "alien" ideas of labour . . . apologetic for big business, admiring of the fascists of Europe for having suppressed communism, and sensing in his very bones the decadence of the democracy he once served, that is Hearst to-day. That is the portrait. But it is also the portrait of the lower middle class of America. It too has gone through the same slow conversion from Jeffersonian faith to the California technique.

As a description of one of the passing disequilibriums in that Cave-of-the-Winds which is Mr. Hearst's mind, this may be accurate. But as a description of the mind of the lower middle class in America it is false. At least, in eight months of travelling about America I have not met a single member of the lower middle class who held these opinions and prejudices. In Omaha, Pittsburg, Detroit, and San Francisco I have met rich men whose opinions would exactly fit Mr. Swing's description. I have yet to meet a poor man of whom the same could be said.

The lower middle class, the non-proletarian poor of America, is not "apologetic for big business," nor "admiring of the fascists of Europe," neither has it been converted from the Jeffersonian faith. It has a faith in freedom and democracy that will surprise the nation if a leader arises to give that faith a chance. Mr. Swing has fallen into the common error of Left-Wing thinkers who are eager to believe that the whole nation must become proletarianized except for the few capitalists and

the lamentable farmers. As part of this picture, the non-proletarian poor have to be wiped off as something too fearful to survive. When this has been done, it is easier to believe in the necessity for communism. Mr. Swing's picture of the lower middle class is flattering compared to that given by the communist authors of *Partners in Plunder*:<sup>1</sup>

It is an awful thing to stir the lower middle class from its customary doltish political placidity. Out of its psychiatric depths arises an ashen terror with strong overtones of homosexual sadism suggestive of appetites and powers too long held in leash.

I assume that Left-Wing authors get these melodramatic pictures of the lower middle class entirely from reading one another's books. In my own travels I have come upon no facts which correspond with the pictures. I may be prejudiced the other way, for I have been looking for people who believe in historic America and there are many such in the lower middle class. Perhaps it is this persistent faith which the communists call "psychiatric."

<sup>1</sup> New York, 1935.

CHAPTER SIX

I

THERE are many Americans who still feel it would take the tang and excitement out of life to protect small property at the cost of interfering with unlimited private enterprise. That, they say, is the chief trouble with communism. We might get along well enough without private property in the means of production, but without private enterprise the spirit perishes. I agree that without a large share of private enterprise life would lose its savour for many people. But private enterprise quite uncontrolled is as destructive to the fun of life as a tyrannically administered communism. Those who doubt this should study the town of Hollywood.

Hollywood is a gold-rush camp in which the gold-rushers, instead of being the world's toughest people, competent to look after themselves, are a group of neurotic artists and promoters. Hollywood is America's best example of private enterprise *à l'outrance*. There is no motive for going to Hollywood except to "get ahead in the world." Nobody would go there to seek peace of mind or soul, to seek solid professional advancement,<sup>1</sup> to settle down and found a family, to do work which is felt to be of value in itself.

None of the simple stabilizing human motives takes people to Hollywood; only the lure of quick money. That lure is notoriously strong, and men and women from

<sup>1</sup> A few directors and a few actors and actresses take Hollywood seriously as a place for a real career. You can tell them, as you go about the town, by the sadness of their faces.

all corners of the earth appear and disappear in that crazy gold-rush. And if their stay in Hollywood is brief they may escape without harm. But there are only two groups whose stay is brief enough for that. The first group is made up of those who fail, whose gold-mine turns out to be a fraud and who go home without suffering anything worse than disappointment. The second group is made up of those who are great successes in their own professions before they ever see Hollywood, and who merely dip in and out of the place from time to time when they want a lot of money fast. Neither of these groups is infected by the gold-rush atmosphere. It is the people who are semi-permanent, the old families of Hollywood who have been there four or five years, of whom I wish to write. These people show what can happen to the human spirit in a world where private enterprise is unhampered.

Two men seem to me typical of the permanent colony in Hollywood—both charming, both writers of high talent, both lost. The first might seem to be lost because he is not quite a success, the second because his success is too complete. In fact, they are lost because they have "gone Hollywood." You know that a man has gone Hollywood when, his nightly drunkenness having set in, he tells you how his soul is starved in that meretricious place, and in the same maudlin paragraph sneers at a man across the room because he has been doing scripts for three years and still makes less than a thousand dollars a week. Or when an actor whom you knew in London when he was lucky to have five pounds to spend tells you he is only in Hollywood to make the cash to buy a Sussex cottage where he plans to retire, and then tells you that "nobody" could stand the Hotel at Palm Springs because the swimming-pool is so placed that when you dive you get the sun in your eyes. It is the combination of gold-rush standards with a fake soul that is the essence of Hollywood.

If these two men whom I feel are lost dared say they were staying in Hollywood because they got more satisfaction out of having a lot of money to spend than out of all else life offered, I would feel they might recover at any moment and be again what they once were. But they never admit any such motive. Instead, they invent the fake soul. The one who is not quite successful tells me he is only staying in Hollywood to prove he can get right to the top. The minute he does that he will leave and return to his "serious work." And the one who is right at the top tells me that the only reason he stays in Hollywood is because no one can hold his present position for more than a few years, or recapture it ever, so it seems only sensible to cash in while it lasts so that when he goes back to his "real" work he will be able to provide well for his wife (he has had four).

And night after night they both get drunk, and then they tell of all their brave plans for works of art after they leave Hollywood, and of all the splendid emotions they find in their fake souls.

Most of America was in danger of "going Hollywood" in the late 1920's. Most of America had begun to resemble a gold-rush camp. Millions of people who in a favouring world would have known honour and dignity really seemed to believe that the purpose of life was to scramble for cash. If the gold-mine had not given out very quickly, America might to-day be as lost as the two men in Hollywood. But the gold-mine did give out. America was saved not by her virtue, but by Providence. And there is one lesson she ought to learn from those slack disgusting years: if a great nation worships private enterprise it will land in the sty.

This is not to say that enterprise is a bad thing. It is on a par with many of our appetites and instincts—good if subjected to a larger purpose, deadly if taken as an end in itself. This is elementary moralizing, yet there is



reason to think the American public does not understand it. There is to-day an organization called the Liberty League. Many of America's leading citizens belong to it. The Liberty League in its publicity seems to make little distinction between private enterprise and private property; it seems to think that these are two sides of a single institution and that freedom for one is the same as freedom for the other. But America will never even understand her social and political problems, much less solve them, unless these facts are clearly seen: first, that enterprise (as used to describe the business spirit) is something which, if checked and firmly ruled, will animate a real system of private property, thus becoming an ally of liberty; second, that enterprise if allowed to seek its own ends unruled by social purpose, will destroy a real system of private property, destroy liberty, and enslave a nation to one of the least attractive of the seven deadly sins.

Even a collectivist like Mr. R. H. Tawney has seen this. In *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* Mr. Tawney summarizes the medieval view on this point: "It is right," he says, "for a man to seek such wealth as is necessary for a livelihood in his station. To seek more is not enterprise, but avarice, and avarice is a deadly sin." And Henry of Langenstein, a fourteenth-century schoolman, wrote as follows: "He who has enough to satisfy his wants and nevertheless ceaselessly labours to acquire riches, either in order to obtain a higher social position, or that subsequently he may have enough to live without labour, or that his sons may become men of wealth and importance—all such are incited by a damnable avarice, sensuality, or pride."

Americans reject instinctively the idea that they have a "station" in life. And many Americans will feel it is going too far to tell a man he should not seek riches in order to improve his social position, or to make his children wealthy and important. Yet there is much in

American history which suggests that if Americans want a free society they must base their economic order on principles such as these. A world in which all men are ceaselessly gambling in the hope of "bettering themselves" cannot maintain a real system of private property or of freedom. If America allows herself to be enslaved to greed, it will not be long before she is politically enslaved as well—either to a tyrant of the Right who will force all men to conform to a fascist moral code, or to a tyrant of the Left who will force them to conform to the moral code of communism. Meanwhile it is still America's privilege to conform of her own free will to a moral code that would go with democracy and freedom. If she does not do so, if she continues to construe freedom to mean unlimited private enterprise, she shall have earned her tyranny.

As Mr. Tawney points out, the importance of the medieval view of economics lies "in its insistence that society is a spiritual organism, not an economic machine, and that economic activity, which is one subordinate element within a vast and complex unity, requires to be controlled and repressed by reference to the moral ends for which it supplies the material means." Which view will America take—that society is a spiritual organism, or that it is an economic machine? If she takes the former, then economics are subordinate to politics, and both to morals. In that case she can have the sort of "planned society" her forefathers intended: a society based on moral principles which are clearly understood, a society in which the major institutions (such as private property and self-government) are chosen *and maintained* because they are in keeping with the principles, a society with the freedom that only self-discipline can give. Planning, in these basic political-moral terms, is the purpose of statesmanship.

If America takes the latter view, that society is an

economic machine, then she cannot attempt political or moral planning. A machine is a fixed thing; you cannot tamper with its nature. You can only see that it runs as smoothly as possible. In other words, the only planning such a society can attempt is economic planning. And if the citizens suspect that economic planning, even if it were perfect of its kind, must lead to tyranny, their problem is whether to put up with the tyranny in the hope of a smoothly running machine, or whether to let the machine knock itself to pieces without benefit of planning.

Many Americans to-day accept as self-evident this picture of society as an economic machine. They say they are caught in a system they cannot alter, that they must go on to bigger and bigger concentrations of power, to a more and more slave-like, or ant-like, state—that the only choice is whether to hasten their servitude by “planning” it, or whether to postpone it as long as possible by vain resistance. The reason these people feel the system cannot be changed is because they will not examine it fundamentally. They will not examine the moral assumptions on which the system rests. Mr. Tawney, after pointing out how far short of its ideals the medieval world fell, adds: “If it is proper to insist on the prevalence of avarice and greed in high places, it is not less important to observe that men called these vices by their right names, and had not learned to persuade themselves that greed was enterprise and avarice economy.”

So long as a society does call its vices by their right names there is ground for hope that the vices may be brought under control and that social and moral improvements may follow. The right names are too strong, too pungent, to lend themselves to pseudo-scientific blather. No one, for instance, would have the gall to say: “Of course our entire civilization is based on greed, cruelty,

and avarice. It is the free play of these emotions which has led the modern world to all its greatness, which has helped us set up the highest standard of living ever known. Sentimentalists may think that greed and cruelty are not pretty. They may sigh for a softer, less progressive age. But they cannot set back the clock. Our future task is not to curb the emotions which have served us so well, but to find what further developments may be latent within them."

If you take the live uncompromising words from that declaration, substituting abstract concepts, many people would then be willing to say: "Of course our entire civilization is based on business enterprise and self-interest. It is the free play of these emotions which has led the modern world to all its greatness, etc."

I am not saying that greed is always the right name for business enterprise, cruelty always the right name for self-interest. But I assume everyone knows that these are sometimes the right names. And I am saying that we muddy up the whole issue, confuse the whole problem, by refusing to distinguish, by using the abstract, polite, vague name of all occasions, the live human name not at all. Further, I am saying it is only this sloppy thoughtlessness which makes it possible to believe we are caught in a system we cannot alter, to believe we must go on and on along a rut of economic determinism even if that rut plainly leads to the death of every value the heart holds dear.

Any economic system can be changed if its moral assumptions are clearly understood and are felt to be displeasing—but the displeasure has to be sincere, not merely formal. The economic order does not have an independent existence. Behind economics lie morals. The morals of a society may be high or low, conscious or unconscious; but they cannot be non-existent. And the morals of a society determine what

emotions will be allowed free play, what social conditions will be tolerated—they determine, in other words, the limits within which the economic system must move. In an intellectually slack world such as ours, where people are unaccustomed to thinking in moral terms, unaccustomed to keeping the right names in mind, the economic order can warp and twist the morals of a society, can “determine” them to a certain extent. But even in our world there is a last resistant set of moral assumptions which the economic order cannot change, to which the economic order must adjust itself.

For example, it has been thought economically desirable to plough under part of America’s cotton. The same reasoning which led to that thought would make it economically desirable to plough under a part of the share-croppers. But the cotton is ploughed under; the share-croppers are left half alive. And the reason for this inconsistency is a moral reason.<sup>1</sup>

The more conscious a society is of its moral aims, the more aware it is of the relation between its aims and its actions, the less it will be economically determined. The closer it will be to the ideal of a society as a “spiritual organism,” in which the economic order supplies the material means for the moral ends of life. Conversely, the more successful a society is in forgetting its moral ends—the more it shuns the truth by refusing to use the right names for its actions, by insisting on the flattering abstract concepts—the more will economic determinism operate, the closer will the society come to being an “economic machine.” No society can be an economic machine pure and simple, for there is always a moral basis somewhere. And no society can become a spiritual

<sup>1</sup> Economic pressure may have led certain civilizations to plough under their redundant populations by means of war—an expensive form of ploughing. But even if this has happened, it is not the same thing as direct action.

organism pure and simple, for that would be perfection, and there can be no perfect social system previous to the appearance of perfect men. But between these two extremes the social order can vary infinitely. In the one direction it approaches a more and more unconscious, a more and more mechanical and determined state. In the other direction it approaches greater and greater awareness of the relation between what it does in the economic sphere and what it feels to be right. This does not mean that in such a state men usually do what they feel they ought to do; but it does mean that in such a state there is hope for the future. Men know, to a certain extent, what they are doing. They intend, to a certain extent, to do better. It is possible that they may rouse themselves at any minute to a serious effort.

In the other kind of world, however, at the other end of the scale, where society has drifted as far as possible toward a mechanically determined state, there is little hope. The citizens of such a state feel that the economic drift cannot be changed—and they are right, in the sense that it cannot be changed merely by fiddling with the external mechanical details. It can only be changed by a moral attack, by reawakening the citizens of the state to an awareness of how their economic conduct betrays their moral feelings, and to a grave discontent with that betrayal. If the citizens are incapable of such an awakening, then to all intents their state has become an "economic machine," a lifeless, soulless thing, a Civilization.

For here again is one of the prime distinctions between a Culture and a Civilization. In a Culture the moral world is known to be a reality. People in a Culture are aware of their moral aims. They admit them, even if they make little effort to live up to them. They call them by the right names, and they try with more or less persistence, more or less success, to express them in

conduct. Society is alive, changing. It is full of hope and passion. Everything, good or bad, has intense meaning.

In a Civilization, on the other hand, the moral world is felt to be a polite fiction—a useful fiction, perhaps, when it comes to keeping other people in order, but hardly plausible. The economic world is felt to be the reality—for the economic world, if its moral base be ignored, can be described in terms that are almost wholly mechanical, scientific, and therefore unmoral, and therefore “civilized.” But if the economic world is the reality, and if the economic world is mechanically determined, man has no effective freedom of will. And in that case life has little meaning. So the passion, the hopefulness, the signs of life that characterize a Culture, give way in a Civilization to signs that the significance is draining out of the world, that the moral possibilities are felt to be exhausted, and above all that nothing is either good or bad unless you happen at the moment to think it so.

One way of stating the American problem, then, is to ask whether Americans still have the energy and the hope to try to make their society a “spiritual organism,” or whether they are content to have it an “economic machine.” If the latter, then they have reached the Civilization stage and have nothing before them but an unearned and hence an ungraceful old age.

## 2

If America is to become an economic machine, if that description of her place in history is to be accepted, all the people I know who seem most characteristically American will first have to be put out of the way. This would not be easy, for it is my guess that such people are still in a majority. They began to lose confidence in themselves during the great days of industrial expansion following the Civil War, when the new race of go-getters

was loud in the land. They seemed to feel that people so noisy and so nerve-wracking must have an important mission in the world, else God would not permit them at all. For a long time the "real" Americans watched what went on with a growing feeling that although this new world had no place in it for them it might all be for the best. Recently they have waked to the conviction that it was all for the worst, and they are getting ready to try to call a halt.

A few months ago I was a guest overnight at a club in Boston. The members of the club were faced with the question whether to leave their old building and move to opulent new quarters which were to be had cheap. The new quarters were a large and slightly gaudy private house, built a few years ago by a man whose sudden fortune has since dissolved. In the morning after breakfast a group of members came into the room where I was reading and began discussing the problem of the move. An old gentleman (who was addressed by one of the famous names of Massachusetts) protested against the proposed new quarters. In the first place, he said, the house was too grand for the club. A man ought always to live in surroundings which are below his position. In the club, he said, they had a little merit but not much weight, and would make themselves ridiculous by going to live in an environment fit either for a very great man or for a charlatan. And then, in the second place, he said, the house was a monument to an evil day in American history—to the gambling, swaggering era of "prosperity for ever." The spirit of the place would be an insult to a club of decent men.<sup>1</sup>

I think that good old man is a more representative sample of the American people than many critics would like to admit. Travelling about the country I have met

<sup>1</sup> It is a comfort to remember this man when reading the advertisements for Listerine Tooth Paste.



many men of all classes whose salty good sense and direct moral judgments reminded me of the old gentleman in Boston. I have met only two men who reminded me of Mr. "Piggy" Wiggin.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Wiggin is not, I think, the sort of thing that naturally tends to happen in America. After two generations of increasing absorption in "getting ahead," of increasing forgetfulness of the moral judgments on which the state once rested, the disease culminated in that sultry post-war decade during which America went mad. During America's madness she made some alarming friends. But she must not depress herself, now that she seems to be getting better, by thinking that she is naturally given to people like that.

Leaving the Boston club on the morning I overheard this conversation, I crossed the street to a drug-store to buy some hair tonic. It was a small shop, a survival from the days when a chemist sold no books, no lingerie, no stationery, no food. I asked the proprietor to recommend a hair tonic.

"No," he said.

"You have no hair tonic?"

"Yes," he said, getting quite talkative, "I have."

"Well, which do you recommend?"

"I don't," he said patiently, "recommend any hair tonic."

"You mean you have only bad ones?"

"No—I doubt if they're all *bad* exactly." He opened a glass case and took out a small bottle. "Here's one I put up myself. So at least I know it's harmless. And you don't have to pay ten times what it's worth." He looked at the bottle sadly. "But I certainly wouldn't recommend it."

"Why not?" I asked.

<sup>1</sup> Head of the Chase National Bank during the late financial unpleasantness.

"Because I can't see what good it can do. Unless you just want something to hold your hair in place."

"Is that true of *all* tonics," I asked, naming a couple of well-known brands.

"Oh, no," he said. "Those are definitely harmful."

So I left without buying anything, but with the growing feeling that there are still plenty of Americans who do not think solely of pushing ahead in the world.

And then, of course, there is the South. As I said before, the chief glory of the South is that it still has lots of people who do not care a penny's-worth about "getting ahead"—people who have always instinctively followed the theologian's advice to seek enough to satisfy their wants but not to labour ceaselessly for riches. In every Southern town and village, and scattered all through the countryside, are men and women who are a *source of honest grief to their northern observers*: men and women who seem to feel no obligation to expand financially, who scorn the challenge of "success," who have time to talk, time to sit mooning and let the soul grow up, time to eat leisurely, time to walk with a gait suggesting the heresy that it is just as important to keep cool as to reach your destination. From the beginning of American history northern visitors have been trying to rouse a decent shame in these people by pointing out the useful and profitable ways in which they might spend their time.

"In the important town of Charlotte, North Carolina," wrote a shocked Bostonian in the 1860's, "I found a white man who owned the comfortable house in which he lived, who had a wife and three children, and yet had never taken a newspaper in his life. He thought they were handy for wrapping purposes, but he couldn't see why anybody wanted to bother with the reading of them. He knew some folks spent money for them,

but he also knew 'a-many' a house where none had ever been seen."

But the good advice, brought to the South on every northern breeze, has never taken. The thing gets worse and worse. I have a Southern friend to-day who does not even think newspapers are good for wrapping purposes.

I know, of course, about "the new South"—the industrial towns where the worst features of the North are copied while the good features are left out. But I do not think "the new South" will flourish. I do not think the Southern temper will be changed by the modern carpet-baggers any more than it was cowed by the carpet-baggers of the 'sixties. As Mr. Douglas Jerrold has remarked, "economic materialism preached by a bankrupt society is an unimpressive creed." Besides, no South has ever been caught by northern ideas—though all Souths in the Western world have known conquering Northern armies, for all Souths (compared to their own Norths) are lucky.

Even in England, where a delightful people has been half-subjected to the spirit of all the Norths in all the world: getting ahead, reading newspapers, making two tin cans appear where yesterday there was only one, never sitting on your heels and wasting time—even in England there is a growth in grace as you approach the South coast. In the North is Lancashire, the Black Country, and the terrible Five Towns. In the North is Manchester, where you cannot tell when you have left one grim city and entered the next. Stockport, Dukinfield, Oldham, Manchester, Eccles, Salford: if all the waste land and mistreated souls within this circle were added together, it would make one of the world's largest cities. And one of the world's most desperate—for here is the home of unemployment. Here is the garden where modern progress began; and here lives

a generation of men who have lost hope, side by side with a younger generation that has known no hope to lose.

Looking at it now in its decline, it is hard to see what devil prompted men to spoil a countryside with this dump-heap of dejected stone. But had we seen it in its busy glory, when from these dark towns came a stream of profits that cemented an empire, bringing similar progress to half the world, we should have known at once that the devil's name is Greed. It is for Greed that

Smoke rolls in stinking suffocating wrack  
On Shakespeare's land, turning the green one black;  
The crowds that once to harvest home would come  
Hope for no harvest and possess no home, . . .  
Because the world must, like the tramp, move on,  
There does not seem much else that can be done.  
As Lord Vangelst said in the House of Peers :  
"None of us want Reaction." (Tory cheers.)

It is the spirit of the North (of all Norths everywhere) to call Manchester by the name of Progress and to throw the word Reaction at any policy that might diminish these hells. The religion of the North is Puritanism which, as Mr. Tawney writes, "in its later phases added a halo of ethical sanctification to the appeal of economic expediency, and offered a moral creed, in which the duties of religion and the calls of business ended their long estrangement in an unanticipated reconciliation." According to the religion of the North, "practical success is at once the sign and the reward of ethical superiority." "Godliness," said a Puritan pamphleteer, "hath the promises of this life as well as of the life to come."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Tawney comments: "A society which reverences the attainment of riches as the supreme felicity will naturally be disposed to regard the poor as damned in the next world if only to justify itself for making their life a hell in this."

In the religion of the South, however, "he who has enough to satisfy his wants" should not "ceaselessly labour to acquire riches." He should take time out once in a while to lie down in the shadow of a hedge and contemplate the strange world he inhabits. A prerequisite for this is a climate wherein a man can fairly often be quiet out of doors without being cold. In the North of England this does not happen more than a few times a year; but in the South (which people who do not know the North think of as having the most forlorn climate to which the white man has ever adapted himself) there are often several weeks in a summer during which the sun peers vaguely through the wet air. The greatest achievement of the Englishman (though it is not often mentioned in text-books) is that his character very nearly triumphed over this climate that seems made for wicked brooding, and over the get-rich-quick temptations of his coal. Yet in the end the temptations overcame him. England became the first purely business, purely finance-capitalist, nation in history. Not only the first, but for all time the pleasantest. For alone among the people who are "Northern" in geography, in religion, and in trade, the English have a large and ineradicable share of "Southernness" in their temperament. In spite of their capitulation to "success" the English still tend to take life quietly and with humour. They are seldom truly feverish about getting ahead. Life often seems as important to them as trade, and they are impenitent in their refusal to judge life's richness by the complication of its plumbing. They remain the world's most attractive people in spite of their northern island soaked with the fog of the German Ocean and in spite of having been sold out long ago to the religion that says "business is business." They might have been as perfect as some of them think they are, if their home had been a real South, or if their beautiful moist island had not concealed

such dangerous veins of coal. The coal alone could never have persuaded so friendly and humane a people to build anything as heart-breaking as Manchester; it was the coal combined with those black Northern waters, those asphalt-coloured skies, that maddened the charming Englishman to the point where he really believed that "business is business," where he put everything he had on the wrong horse, with the result that to-day his fellow-citizens "hope for no harvest and possess no home."

I am not trying to suggest that men's natural aptitudes for good or bad vary with their distance from the equator. But chance has arranged it, in our Western world, that the men of the South are relatively blessed, for in comparison with their Northern brothers they are less tempted to forget all else in the pursuit of gold. For a long time it was thought that this was only of benefit to the Southerner's soul, so his Northern neighbours pitied him. Lately, however, as the get-poor-quick tendencies of finance-capitalism have become more and more pronounced, it has begun to seem as if there were something to be said for the unbusiness-like South even in this world.

Mr. Ford Madox Ford, who finds in Provence (that *Province which was already old when the Romans came to it*) the true home of what is best in our world, pictures civilization as a foolish adventurer pushing north and west, "to places like Paris, London, Dublin or Detroit, in search of adventure, of pioneering, winning numbers in lotteries, Empire. . . . And he found, poor hero! nothing but always worse and worse climates, worse and worse food, worse and worse Crises, worse and worse wars, pestilences, indigestions and despairs; heresies, inquisitions; worse music, dances, fears for his soul."

This is a prejudiced statement; but the man who has loved any South, anywhere, will know what Mr. Ford means, and will be grateful for the exaggeration.

America is lucky in having a large South. That South has done much for the country in the past, and will do much in the future. One of its services will always be a refusal to take seriously the crude Northern doctrine that "practical success is at once the sign and the reward of ethical superiority." Another of its services will be to keep alive the belief in standards of conduct. Such a belief may at times lead to barbarity, to injustice. Yet without the belief a society must die. In the South, because life is closer to the land, the towns themselves having an organic relation with the land,<sup>1</sup> life is also closer to reality. One result of this is an intensity of feeling, finding expression at times in the sort of violent action which the New York journalist finds "uncivilized." And the journalist is right. Such violence is "uncivilized" according to the meaning attached to Civilization in this book. It is the essence of Civilization to feel less and less strongly about fewer and fewer things, approaching always toward that happy point (otherwise known as the grave) where people feel nothing at all about anything. In New York parlance, it is "civilized" to be a pacifist, to believe sincerely that there is nothing on earth worth fighting for. It is "civilized" (and I have heard the word used in just this sense) not to care in the least whether your wife goes to bed with a negro, or for that matter with a negress. It is "civilized" to be incapable of indignation or surprise and to be unwilling to stoop to moral judgments. "Anything Goes."

A very pretty expression of the "civilized" ideal was given by Mr. H. G. Wells in *The Shape of Things to Come*. He first pictured the mess that was about to be made of the world by its present inmates. Then he showed the clean and tidy life that would one day emerge from the chaos. Optimistically, Mr. Wells thought

<sup>1</sup> Except for a few towns of "the new South"—towns like Birmingham, Alabama—small but terrible reminders of Manchester.

this would take place in a relatively short time. At the end of this historically brief period man would live peacefully and scientifically for the simple reason that he would have been "rationalized," would have been cleansed of all essential differences in race, language, and religion. The brave new world, in other words, would be inhabited by spiritual and moral albinos, who would have no more cause for quarrelling than a lot of capons.

Our leaders of Civilization all seek to cure the combativeness in man, not by improving his moral nature, but by depriving him of the vital faiths for which he fought. There have been religious wars—therefore teach man that religion is a myth. Many people have a colour prejudice—therefore teach man to inter-breed so that black and white and yellow may fuse into a bilious grey. So it goes—at every point in the progress man loses a few more of his roots, a few more of his vitalizing convictions. And the end is "civilized" man, disdainfully surprised (like the Aztec nobles) that any people should take their own God with a special seriousness, ready to be rubbed out by the first group which does not agree that

*Tout est bu, tout est mangé ! Plus rien à dire !*

In contrast to this it is the essence of Culture to believe in absolutes, to take life seriously, to turn regrettably violent under provocation. I am not presenting this capacity for violence as a good-in-itself. It is a sign of life, and therefore desirable. It can lead to some of the worst actions of which man is capable, and therefore must be controlled. But the emphasis should be on control, not on castration. The nerveless, enervated Civilization-man cannot remain free. On his own showing he does not think anything is worth fighting for—not even that incomplete, relative, but exciting possession we call liberty. He will know freedom only until somebody



thinks it worth while to enslave him. But neither can the passionate barbarian remain free. There is anarchy within him; he will either live in an anarchic state, or order will be imposed from without. But between these two—between barbarism and Civilization, between anarchy and tyranny, between the physical nomad (the red indian) and the intellectual nomad (the cosmopolitan)—there is the stage where man has not lost his faith in the absolute meaning of life and where he has gained a power to control (within limits) the strength that comes with certainty of mind. At that stage man can be free. He knows that with all its limitations freedom is a better thing than slavery, and no one will take this partial freedom from him without a fight. For at that stage he believes in his own soul—and he knows that the soul of man does not prosper under tyranny.

Those who are shocked at the violence latent in the American character—and especially, I think, in the Southern character—should remember there are two ways to check such violence, and that one of them is a worse evil than the evil it combats. The bad way is to try to convince people that life simply is not worth taking so seriously, that violence is always uncivilized and silly—in fact, that people are quite likely to laugh at you if you go on behaving that way. There is not much danger that such a propaganda would soon succeed, that a determining number of Americans would become caponized. But in so far as the propaganda had effect, the effect would be bad.

The useful way to fight the national violence is to try to build the America which was originally intended: a nation where most men would be relatively free economically, and therefore politically, a nation whose citizens would be glad to fight to save their country from tyranny, but where a minimum of people had a vested interest in turning things upside down. In such

a nation the immense energy of America could spend itself more pleasingly than at present; and in building such a nation it would be found that more help came from the too-violent Southerner, and from the Ku Kluxer of the Middle West, than from the refined intellectuals of New York. The Civilization-man is a defeatist by temperament and by profession. He has nothing to say for America except that she is sold out. If the nation drifts downhill into tyranny he will doubtless be quite caustic and witty about the whole affair; but at the first mention of trying to ward off tyranny, of trying to save the historic basis of the state, he begins to mumble about not turning back the clock. And a trying thing about him is that he will blame his fellow-citizens, he will blame America, if the time comes when a short-tempered dictator, failing to enjoy his cleverness or to discover his utility, moves him to a concentration camp.

## 3

A friend of mine was once shopkeeper for a company-store in the coal regions of Kentucky. The miners were mountaineers whose families had lived in the country round about since the first settling of the state. They were a laconic people, but they expressed themselves clearly enough in action.

One night my friend was working on his books at the store when the door opened and a miner named Jim stumbled into the room. Jim was drunk and he carried a revolver.

"I'm going to kill you," he said.

"Why?"

"You've been cheating me on the company books—I never get out of debt."

"No, I haven't, Jim." My friend thought he had better pretend to be more calm than he felt. He got out a ledger. "Come have a look at the books."

Jim did not put up his gun, but he looked over my friend's shoulder and pretended to follow the accounts. After ten minutes my friend looked up.

"You see, Jim—nothing tricky there. You had everything you've been charged with, and the figures add up straight."

"I'm going to kill you," said Jim monotonously.

"But why?"

"You've been cheating me."

My friend suddenly realized what he was up against. Obviously, Jim couldn't read, so nothing he could be shown would convince him. He was drunk, and he had a fixed idea. He had only been pretending to read what was on the books. My friend had lived long enough in the Kentucky mountains to know that killing him would seem to Jim a perfectly natural act. So he did the only possible thing—he grabbed for the gun, and he and Jim fought it out on the floor for two minutes. Jim was the stronger of the two, but he was also drunk, so in the end he lost the gun and was driven out of the store.

An hour later my friend was lying in bed in his shack, feeling none too secure. Suddenly there was a knock on the door.

"Who's there?"

"Me—Robert."

Robert was a giant of a man who, in the two years my friend had run the store, had never been known to speak a dozen words on end. Robert would point his finger at the things he wanted on the shelves, raise his eyebrows if he had to ask the price, and nod his head in thanks when he left the store with his packages. Yet the two men were friendly; each had a sense that the other liked him.

"What do you want?"

"Let me in."

Uneasily my friend opened the door—then got back into bed.

Robert, with an effort, got out quite a long sentence :  
“ Did Jim say you’d been cheating him ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Drunk ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Did he try to kill you ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ What’d you do ? ”

“ I took his gun away from him.”

“ What you planning to do ? ”

“ Nothing.”

Robert stared at my friend for a minute, exhausted by all this talk. Then he turned and opened the door, saying negligently as he went out, “ I’ll kill the son of a bitch in the morning.”

When they met on the following day Jim was carrying a rifle. Robert took it away from him, hit him over the head with the barrel and left him for dead. Jim’s head was harder than Robert had thought, so he did not die. He only had a fractured skull. But as soon as he was well enough to move he left the neighbourhood. He came from Tennessee and had no kin in Kentucky to protect him, and Robert was known as a man who finished what he began.

Robert’s point of view was simple: Jim had tried to kill a friend of Robert’s, and for no good reason. The friend was one of those queer outlanders who didn’t seem able to do his own killing. So it seemed only reasonable that Robert should do it for him.

I am not pretending this is an ideal way to keep the peace. But it is worth comparing Robert’s attitude with that of the sophisticated New Yorker. The “ civilized ” man has learned to take a psychological view of all conduct—to explain it away in terms of some mechanical, unconscious compulsion. And it is hardly worth fighting over the difference between one mechanical act and

another. But Robert felt there are certain things which make all the difference in the world. Some of the things Robert believes in might seem funny or foolish to the rest of us. But what is neither funny nor foolish is the act of belief, the capacity to *know* that there are certain moral and social absolutes which must not be tampered with. In this respect Robert is a good man. He is the kind of man on whom a stable social order might be built. On the average cosmopolitan, however, it would not be possible to build anything more stable than a stock-exchange.

Mr. George H. Doran, the publisher, recently explained with some pride the "Credo" on which he based his career. "I would publish no book," wrote Mr. Doran, "which destroyed a man's simple faith in God without providing an adequate substitute." Sentences like these dramatize the gulf between the Civilization-man and the Culture-man. There is no common ground between people who think an author can provide "an adequate substitute" for God and people who think he cannot. I found the same barrier the other day in New York while discussing the South with two of my most "civilized" friends. One is a newspaper editor; the other a publisher. I said that of all the wars in history the one that seemed to me the most clearly necessary was the American Civil War, which was not only a fight between economic interests but a fight between sharply defined moral principles as well. My friends disagreed—but not on the ground that I was wrong in thinking there had been a real conflict of principles. Had they said that, I could have understood them, and our disagreement would merely have been on a question of fact. But what they actually said was that the war need never have taken place, for the South should have been sensible enough "not to fight against the inevitable."

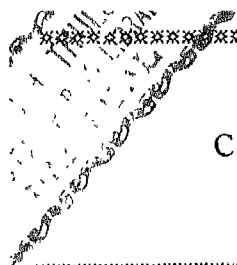
I asked my friends please to be a little more clear. Were they willing to accept my assumption that the South believed passionately in its own way of life, believed that the world it was trying to create was good, and that the world the North was building was wicked? And, accepting all that, were they then going on to say that the South should have given in without a fight, should have abandoned its faith and its principles, merely because the North looked very strong, merely because a disinterested man might have predicted that the North was likely to win in the end?

Yes, they both said; that was exactly what they meant. It was stupid, they thought, to provoke four years of barbarous slaughter on behalf of a cause that was lost anyway.

Putting aside, I said, the question of how they could know the cause was lost until they had tried defending it—putting that aside, didn't they realize that if a man felt his cause was right, and that his enemy's cause was wrong, he would have to fight even if he thought the end was inevitable?

No, they said. That seemed to them a very primitive idea.

This is the view of people whose world is relative in all its values. In a culture truth is something man discovers; having found it he may easily think it worth defending. In a civilization truth is something a man makes up—and why get hot and bothered about a little thing like that? Which is America to be? Can she make use of her "primitive" people who believe in something? Or has she only room for people who can be counted on not to fight against the inevitable?



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### I

PEOPLE who think fighting for a cause you believe in is "a very primitive idea" are clearly the stuff of which true pacifists should be made. And pacifism—in the sense of a refusal to soil one's linen in the defence of one's principles—is a by-product of Civilization. My New York friends were "civilized"; the Oxford youths who said they would not fight, in any circumstances, for King or Country, were "civilized." Within its terms of reference such pacifism is both sincere and sensible. In a world where nothing is important, and where nothing is true, it would be foolish to incommode oneself, or other people, by fighting about what does not matter. The pacifism of "civilized" America is logical and sincere. But what of the pacifism in rural America? What of the Mississippi Valley, where American pacifism is at its strongest? I have said the Culture-man believes in absolutes, and takes life seriously, even violently—and I have given Robert, the Kentucky mountaineer, as an extreme example. How does this statement fit with the flourishing pacifist movement in the Valley?

To understand American pacifism, and the American attitude toward foreign policy in general, it is important to keep in mind the difference between the Civilization-groups and the Culture-groups. The Civilization-man in America might absent himself from the felicity of fighting, even after a war has begun. The Culture-man merely absents himself in imagination, before the event,

as part of a sincere benevolence toward the world. But the American benevolence, though sincere, is nothing compared to the American pugnacity. The problem with Middle Western pacifists is not that they might some day refuse to fight in defence of their deeply-felt principles; it is rather that they might very soon insist on fighting in defence of Mr. Hearst's latest whim.

Putting aside the sincere pacifists (and that is exactly what would be done to them in case a war arose), it is an ironic fact that American pacifism as a whole is its own worst enemy. In an article where she tries to describe that elusive concept, the American spirit, Miss Ruth Suckow writes: "It comes out in the catchwords and slogans . . . in the confidently friendly approach of strangers met by chance at the same table in a coffee-shop; in the final question of a waitress in a Western restaurant: 'Have you folks had all you want?' Generous, easy-going, well-met, obtuse, and naïve, friendly first and suspicious only later—it is quite unlike the hard, integrated peasant simplicity of the folk of Europe. It is the 'folks' spirit."

Miss Suckow's adjectives are well chosen: on the one hand, generous, easy-going, well-met; on the other hand, obtuse and naïve. It is an unfortunate fact that in foreign policy, and in relation to such world-important problems as pacifism, American generosity has been at its least effective, American obtuseness at its most harmful. In domestic affairs Americans have been forced of late to do some real thinking about the meaning and future of America. As a result they have matured. But in foreign affairs they have scarcely thought at all, scarcely grown up at all. Yet even in foreign affairs there is one great improvement in the point of view since 1928. Throughout the 'twenties American isolationism was built on a brutal complacency. Americans thought it was their duty to themselves to stay out of Europe because



they were so superior to Europe. They could not afford to take a chance of being contaminated. They had solved the problems of government and economics (and of morals—that went without saying). If Europe still had troubles, that was just too bad. If Americans tried to help, they would be misunderstood, getting no good commensurate with their pain in having to deal with such low fellows.

This wicked, ludicrous pride is gone. The past seven years have taught Americans that they are not living in an earthly paradise, that they have not solved any problems whatever, that they have very nearly ruined the greatest opportunity ever offered to man, and that if they don't look sharp they will finish the job and ruin their country altogether. Their isolationism is no longer based on vacant boastfulness, but on humility. It is not a hostile isolationism, not a stupidly selfish one. They merely feel that they had better learn to solve at least one of their own problems before taking up the question of the rest of the world. This is a great improvement so far as it goes; but unluckily it only goes half-way. Americans are growing humble about their own problems, humble and meek about their failure to make a go of America. But they still think they could quickly tell what was best for Europe. They become unimaginative and priggish the moment they turn from the problem of Arkansas, which they admit they don't understand, to the problem of the Polish Corridor, which they think they could solve in a month.

## 2

It is this naïve belief that the problems which have wracked Europe for a thousand years would be simple to solve—it is this which makes American pacifism sentimental and unreal. It is based on the false premise that wars are made primarily by overt wickedness: by

bad old men in club windows, by munitions-makers, by ambitious politicians, and the like. All these may be factors, but if so they are trivial ones. Wars have deeper roots than that, and unless the pacifist will consider the real roots all his good intentions will be vain.<sup>1</sup>

Normally there are two main roots to any war. One is in sinful human nature, in the fact that man quite honestly loves to fight. The other is in political and economic history: one or both of the combatants will honestly feel oppressed, will honestly believe that resistance is the one hope for safety. No matter how many silly and insincere reasons are added to it, this basic feeling will be there, and this basic feeling will very often be correct. But if both these roots are ignored by pacifist agitators, in favour of unimpressive talk about how wicked it is to kill people and in favour of the baseless theory that only bad men like to fight, then the pacifists do not even succeed in postponing the conflict. In this connection America's latest war is an object-lesson.

In St. Louis, at the Democratic Convention in 1916, there occurred one of the strangest episodes in American history. The man chosen to make the "keynote" speech at the Convention was former Governor Martin Glynn of New York. I quote the account of what happened from Mr. Walter Millis's *Road to War*:

Governor Glynn had decided to stress the note of peace; and to show that peace was not incompatible with honour, he had compiled a long catalogue of instances in our history in which foreign outrage of one sort or another had been adequately met not by war but by diplomacy. It was dull, yet the huge crowd appeared to be absorbing it with interest. He started to skip; instantly shouts arose: "No, no! Go on!

<sup>1</sup> The *complete* pacifist, the Civilization-man, is deracinated, so it is no wonder the roots of war have come up along with the roots of everything else. But that is a poor way to do your weeding.

Give us more!" It began to dawn upon the startled speaker that they meant what they said; they were devouring every word of it. With every case of a past indignity which we had failed to resent with the sword, there came only fresh roars of applause. The speaker hesitated over one particularly flagrant episode, involving the hanging of some American seamen by the British. "What did we do?" shouted the crowd. "We didn't go to war," answered Glynn; and the convention broke loose. "Men jumped up in their seats and danced about the aisles and waved American flags, shouting like schoolboys and screaming like steam sirens." According to one hostile account: "What was going on in their minds was as easily read as if it had been printed. . . . Pacifism had been jeered at, made to seem in opposition to Americanism, until they had come to feel almost apologetic about it. Now they were told that they had been right all the time, that one could be patriotic and pacifistic, that it was the historic American policy to submit to great provocation and historically un-American to go to war over it; and they could not contain themselves."

As Mr. Millis observes, the managers of the Democratic Party learned in St. Louis "the true depth and power of the pacifist sentiment in the country." Quite naturally they chose, as the campaign cry for Wilson's re-election, "He kept us out of war!" But the true shallowness and sentimentality of the pacifist sentiment in the country were not learned until some months later, when America entered the war with the almost universal approbation of her citizens. Nothing very terrible had happened in the meanwhile—nothing half so shocking as the sinking of the *Lusitania*, which had taken place more than a year before the St. Louis Convention. By early in 1917, however, the President had lost patience with the Germans. Instead of holding public opinion back he had begun to push it forward. And public opinion was happy to move toward anything so exciting as battle.

The pacifists had not examined their own hearts. They had not forced themselves to see that wars are made, not

exclusively by politicians or even by German Emperors, but in large part by the original sin to which every man is born. Ignoring this, the pacifists had done nothing to control their own allotments of original sin, so they were ready to become roaring war-mongers almost over-night.

Similarly with the external causes of the war. If there had been an American pacifist movement that meant business, that meant anything at all except a watery benevolence, its duty lay clear before it from the time of the declarations of war in Europe. There were three things to be done. First, the whole influence of the pacifist movement should have been used, openly and unremittingly, to support the President's policy of "neutrality in fact as well as in name." The importance of real neutrality had been made clear by Wilson in his proclamation of August 19th, wherein he asked the people to remember that they were first of all Americans and that it was their duty to act in the interests of their own country.

I venture, therefore, my fellow countrymen [said the President] to speak a solemn word of warning to you against that deepest, most subtle, most essential breach of neutrality which may spring out of partisanship, out of passionately taking sides. The United States must be neutral in fact as well as in name during these days that are to try men's souls. We must be impartial in thought as well as in action, must put a curb upon our sentiments as well as upon every transaction that might be construed as a preference of one party to the struggle before another.

I am not suggesting that such behaviour as this was possible. Neither am I suggesting that pacifism is possible for any but a few saints and a slightly larger group of cynics. I am pointing out what had to be done, had pacifism been sincere.

The second thing to do was to mobilize the whole pacifist opinion of the United States behind Secretary Bryan's

suggestion that American bankers should not lend money to the nations at war. On August 15th the Secretary of State sent a note to J. P. Morgan and Company. "In the judgment of this Government," said the note, "loans by American bankers to any foreign nation which is at war are inconsistent with the true spirit of neutrality." This was common sense. If America was to stay at peace it was important that she should not get a high financial interest in the triumph of one group of belligerents. But just as Wilson's policy of impartiality "in thought as well as action" made too great a demand upon a partisan people, so Bryan's policy made too great a demand upon people who had been taught that "business is business." Rather than lend effective support to either policy the pacifists gave away their game.

The third thing for pacifists to do was to make a campaign in favour of renouncing America's claim to "neutral rights" at sea. So long as the United States contends that she has a right to ship non-contraband goods anywhere she pleases, except through a legal blockade,<sup>1</sup> she will tend to be drawn into all wars in which great naval powers are engaged. Had German diplomacy been less gawky, had Germany known a little something about the American temper, America must have come perilously close to war with England by 1916.

Here again very few pacifists were willing to take action. To give up traditional American "rights," to admit that America must take orders from foreigners and not resent those orders, was unmanly. It was positively Utopian. So the pacifists would have none of it. As President Wilson put it in a letter to Senator Stone: "The honour and self-respect of the nation is involved. We covet peace and shall preserve it at any cost but the loss of honour. To forbid our people to exercise their

<sup>1</sup> In the strict legal sense it was not possible for the Allies to blockade Germany, and no such legal blockade was ever declared.

rights for fear we might be called upon to vindicate them would be a deep humiliation indeed." This is an attitude which pacifists simply cannot afford to take. If a pacifist means business, he must not be tender of his honour. There is never a point where he can stand firm and say, "I will not budge for no man's pleasure, I."

Rather than the stern self-discipline and the unromantic meekness that must be theirs if they were to pursue their ideal honestly, as a moral end in itself, the pacifists preferred mere talk, which was gratifying and which cost them nothing more irksome than the scorn of Theodore Roosevelt. They would not examine their own hearts and try to strengthen themselves against temptation. They would not urge upon their countrymen the unpopular course which pacifism demanded.<sup>1</sup> They would not do anything except repeat tiresomely that fighting was bad and that Americans were good.

There were important exceptions. Bryan, as always, stood out as an honest man with true moral strength. He saw from the first the hard tasks that must be done if America was to avoid war, and he set himself to do them. Had his mind been as strong as his character he might have made effective the idealism which is part of the American temper and which normally dwindles into sentimentality. When Bryan resigned from the Department of State, on the question of the second *Lusitania* note, he was haggard and miserable as a result of his moral struggle. No one can doubt he spoke the truth when he told Mr. McAdoo that he felt sure this note must lead to war, that he believed unalterably in peace, and that to his deep sorrow he could not support the President any longer. The day his resignation was announced, Bryan invited the Cabinet to a final luncheon.

<sup>1</sup> There were some pacifists who urged these courses from the beginning; but they were insignificant in numbers compared to those who called themselves pacifists but who urged nothing inconvenient.

The meal passed in generalities, until just as they were finishing Bryan spoke out with a brief and simple explanation of his act. "Each of us said some pleasant things to him along conversational lines," until it came to Lane, who, perhaps genuinely touched by Bryan's obvious sincerity and nobility of purpose, said: "You are the most real Christian I know." The other was moved. "I must act," he began, "according to my conscience. I go out into the dark. The President has the Prestige and the Power on his side. . . ." Then suddenly he broke down completely, stopped, and finally added: "I have many friends who would die for me." <sup>1</sup>

## 3

When pacifism is a true moral force, as with Bryan, it demands respect and honour even from those of us who accept none of its premises. Had there been more Americans who would suffer for their pacifism, less who were content merely to chatter for it, America might have proved that "there is such a thing as a man being too proud to fight. There is such a thing as a nation being so right that it does not need to convince others by force that it is right." In the event, American conduct cast still further doubt on those improbable statements.

It is reasons such as these that made me say American pacifism is its own worst enemy. It uses the good words, the moral appeal; but it does not really mean them. It diverts energy from the realistic work of trying to protect the world's peace. It tends to the production of more and more Pacts, more and more rosy Declarations, less and less solid efforts to face the harsh facts and to subdue them.

Travelling about the country, lecturing, I have found that the pacifist groups are almost without exception the same groups who are urging the Government to take a strong hand with Japan. This clamour must be unimpressive to the Japanese, for it has always taken more

<sup>1</sup> Walter Millis, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

than moral suasion on the part of foreigners to reverse the declared policy of a Great Power. But putting aside the effect on the Japanese, the effect on the American public of this pacifist militancy is bad. If pacifism does not mean taking a rather humble attitude toward the deeds of nations on the other side of the world, then pacifism has no meaning. And if many of America's most idealistic citizens spend much of their time agitating for a policy that has no meaning, the national mind becomes diluted.

The fact is that in the sphere of foreign relations the American people have the best intentions imaginable. And these unclear good intentions, though attractive, are more dangerous to the world than a selfish foreign policy. They urge America in two directions at the same time. They urge her toward pacifism and they urge her toward becoming the moral dictators of the earth, toward settling every vexed problem from pole to pole. Woodrow Wilson showed these self-cancelling desires flourishing side by side—and it is symbolic that Woodrow Wilson first took America into the greatest conflict in history, and then helped write a muddled peace that neither held down the enemy nor gave him the faintest motive for becoming a friend.

It will always prove much more fun to follow the thrilling active impulse toward moral dictatorship than the self-disciplinary impulse toward pacifism. But if America really wants to settle the problems of the world, the first step is to conquer the world, as the Romans did. If America really wants to keep the peace, the first step is to let other people be wicked in their own peculiar ways. It is this step Americans find so hard to take, for they are naturally a fight-loving race.

In 1798 America began a naval war with France, from which John Adams extricated her at the cost of his waning popularity. During the following hundred and



nineteen years she fought five wars, not counting her quarrels with the Indians. One of the five wars was so unnecessary that it remains a national shame; another was as coldly, cynically imperialistic as anything that took place during the partition of Africa. No Great Power has a worse record than this. Yet the American people think of themselves as peace-loving, and they tend to think of Europeans as a lot of quarrelsome rascals. The reason is that the American people are aware of the honest idealism that they bring to foreign affairs; what they are not aware of is that the idealism has never yet been subjected to the facts. It has no backbone; it has always in a crisis been at the mercy of a simple love of violence.

It is her idealism which urges America "to do something" about Manchuria. The people who have put their hearts into the agitation about "good" China and "bad" Japan are not the oil interests. They are not American exporters. They are attractive, high-minded, disinterested Americans who take pride in the fact that their country has very little to gain. They point out that American interests in Manchuria are small compared to those of Great Britain—yet Britain, in her wicked foreign way, seems disinclined to take a strong hand with Japan, whereas America, in her high-minded way, has been making faces across the Pacific for fifteen years. The pathetic thing is that the American attitude has truly been high-minded. It has also, I think, been soft-minded, for the people who have given their moral support to this attitude are the last people in America to approve of violence. Yet they have been urging their country straight toward war. For, sooner or later, if their idealism had got America deeply committed, if America had made enough high-minded faces at the Japanese, the Japanese would have made a really ugly face back again, and then America's deep-seated trucu-

lence, her childlike love of force, would have taken control. The women who now talk benignly about making Japan keep the peace would turn their fierce energies to making Japan lose the war. Pacifism would be put back in the box until it was time to prepare for the next hostilities. The movement which started with the assumption that nothing on earth is worth fighting for would have ended with the assumption that any American is a traitor who does not seek death gaily in the interest of a cold and miserable corner of North-eastern Asia. American idealism and American violence make a terrible pair. A selfish foreign policy should only lead to wars which might promote the national interest; but soft meddling idealism can cause wars on any subject at any time.

There are signs that the American public has begun to notice the danger it invites when it assumes the rôle of moral dictator to an unsympathetic world. A recent book by Mr. Sidney L. Gulick,<sup>1</sup> who lived for many years in Japan as secretary of the Department of International Justice and Good Will of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, contains these sentences: "The time has come for the people of the United States to renounce all international policies that conflict with our renunciation of war in the Pact of Paris. The United States has no mandate from heaven to control the destinies of Japan, of Manchoukuo, of China, or of any other people in any part of the earth." When men with affiliations such as Mr. Gulick's tell America that she has no mandate from heaven to interfere with all the world, and that the way to keep the peace is to renounce the sort of policies that lead to war, it seems that the American people are growing up. The same harsh experience which taught them that their domestic problems are not as simple as they seemed, that they still have something

<sup>1</sup> *Toward Understanding Japan.*

to learn about building a perfect country, is leading them to wonder whether they had not better slow down in their project for building a perfect world. The one thing they have not yet begun to learn is that other people's problems are sometimes as complicated as their own. Until they have taken that final step, the less advice they give their neighbours the better.

In West Prussia there stands a stone memorial, looking toward the Polish Corridor. On it is written, "Never forget, Germans, of what blind hatred robbed you. Bide the hour which will expiate the shame of this bleeding frontier." And yet, the Corridor which for Germany makes a "bleeding frontier," a wrong that cannot in the end be borne, is for Poland a necessity of life. It is not the fault of anyone alive that both these things should be true, or that they should lead to national policies which are likely some day to clash. There is small use in telling either the Poles or the Germans not to take these things seriously, that war is uncivilized, that Mr. H. G. Wells would disapprove.<sup>1</sup>

Europe is full of problems as dangerous as the Polish Corridor. Too many Americans still think they could be solved by half a dozen men of goodwill—and this in spite of the fact that Americans have never solved the one vexing foreign problem on their own hands, the problem of the freedom of the seas. Here again is a sign of the harm that can be done by a slack idealism that has not been forced to face the facts.

The average American is content to repeat it is "un-

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Wells's solution, of course, is realistic. Judging by *The Shape of Things to Come*, Mr. Wells would handle the Polish-German problem as follows: he would remove their feelings of nationality, teach them to speak a common language, and then iron out the little problem of Catholic versus Protestant civilization by getting rid of their religions altogether. There would then be no problem of the Polish Corridor for there would be no Poland and no Germany. The cure would work if the patients would take it. The patients, at the moment, look stubborn.

thinkable " that he should ever go to war with England. This absolves him from facing the problem which might lead to such a war at any time. When England is involved with a Continental Power her strongest weapon is her control of the sea-routes. But this means that to use her strongest weapon she must interfere with America's foreign trade. And to use her weapon effectively she must interfere with a ruthlessness that takes no account of the rather vague rules of international law. This was made clear in the last war, when British practices led the American State Department to send a note to His Majesty's Government claiming<sup>1</sup> that " the rules of evidence upon which the prize courts determined enemy destination were 'without justification'; the blockade order was 'ineffective, illegal, and indefensible'; the judicial procedure for granting reparation to injured American shippers was 'inherently defective,' and the jurisdiction asserted was 'in violation of the law of nations.' "

The Swedish Government congratulated Washington on this defence of neutral rights, and I do not think that anyone, studying the matter with the dispassion which is easy in time of peace, would deny that the American note was a moderate statement of fact. Yet the British Government made no change in the practices against which America protested—and for the very good reason, put forward by Sir Edward Grey to Colonel House, that if they paid attention to America's legal points they might not be able to " prevent Germany from trading . . . as freely in time of war as in time of peace." In other words, Great Britain intended to win the war; she was willing if necessary to let America win the debate on international law. But the debate might not have remained verbal. Had Germany not been even more annoying than England, had the dominant groups in America not been

<sup>1</sup> As summarized by Mr. Walter Millis, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

strong partisans of the Allies, and had not the official American Ambassador in Great Britain (as well as some of the unofficial Ambassadors) been willing to put British interests above American, the debate might have been settled with the sword. Obviously, one sure way to avoid war with Great Britain is to send her an ambassador who will help her get exactly what she wants; but such conditions seldom obtain. Yet there is always American trade, and there is always the British navy.

How do American pacifists plan to solve this vexing problem? Do they urge America to make up her mind in advance never again to insist on her "neutral rights"? Some of them do; but not many. Do they urge America to define what she thinks are her rights, and to declare in advance that she will maintain these at any cost, so that Great Britain may know what she has to count on? Very few do this. Most of them are content to say that war between the two countries is "unthinkable." And then they wonder naïvely why, with the one dangerous Anglo-American problem not only unsolved, but unmentioned, the Admirals have trouble with their naval ratios.

Miss Ruth Suckow finds the American, with all his virtues, "obtuse and naïve." It is important to diminish the obtuseness and naïveté before Europe drifts toward her next war. There has been enough awakening, I believe, so that America will not be driven to fight Japan in order to preserve the peace of Asia.<sup>1</sup> But America's blundering pacifism is more than likely to drag her into the next war in Europe. People will then say, "You

<sup>1</sup> Why do Americans never think of controlling the carnage on their own roads before they police the rest of the world? American casualties from road accidents in 1934 were 990,000, which is more than the casualties of Great Britain in any year of the World War. If that war was the shocking affair that many profess to think, what of the American casual peace-time slaughter? The motor car, of course, is good business. It is also good fun. But the same has often been said of war.

see, the world is so small, these days, that no Great Power can keep out of a major fight." However, America will not have been dragged in because the world is small, but because her foresight is small, her self-knowledge is small, her power to learn from experience is tiny. The American mind so far as it deals with foreign affairs is still "obtuse and naïve." Americans have decided, sensibly enough, that they will not belong to the European system, that they will not join alliances, or even leagues, or take any active part in preserving the peace of the Continent. But the reason for "keeping out of Europe" in time of peace is so that they may also keep out in time of war. It is a pity, therefore, that they take no steps to make the latter situation even probable. They cannot keep out of a long war in Europe unless they refrain from getting a heavy financial interest in the victory of one side. They cannot keep out of a long war in Europe unless they settle the problem of their neutral trade: either by giving up their "rights" voluntarily, in advance, when there is no question of coercion or of national honour; or else by making it clear, again in advance, that they will protect their "rights" with overwhelming force. Such a declaration (assuming they had a merchant marine in which to carry their trade) would greatly diminish the risk of war. But the sure way to make trouble is to waver in advance, and then get angry after the fact when some Power has taken advantage of their indecision.

It is doubtful, however, whether an active policy of defending American "rights" would be supported by the American people. Such a policy is bound to work against the interest of the maritime powers. Together with American violence goes a fierce partisanship. Americans might fight for the right to trade with the devil if a supercilious British Board of Trade told them it was not permitted; but when it came to watching Great Britain lose a war because they had insisted, from the beginning,

in trading with a Continental Power—I doubt whether the American people would go through with it. In England, and along the American seaboard, it is easy to over-estimate the feeling of “cousinship” between the two countries. Over most of America there is no such feeling at all. But it should never be forgotten that the people who have this feeling are likely to be in key positions, both in determining policy and in forming public opinion.

The one sure way for America to stay out of Europe is to admit that the price of peace in a warring world is to be relatively humble and to refrain from insisting on neutral rights. Will truculent America, who has so often shown her readiness to “quarrel with a man for coughing in the street because he hath wakened a dog that hath lain asleep in the sun”—will America accept this gentle rôle? Temporarily, I think she may. For America—or at any rate inland America—is determined “to keep out of Europe.” There is a slow awakening to the knowledge that this cannot be done without forethought and sacrifice. And the desire to keep clear is so strong that the sacrifices, as they come to be understood, will probably be made. For America’s new isolationism, based on the feeling that she has an exigent problem on her hands in putting her own house to order, is even stronger than America’s old isolationism based on a vulgar pride. The new isolationism is not only stronger; it is less likely to be quickly overthrown, since it is both more realistic and more moral.

America has learned at the eleventh hour that it is not easy to be a free democracy, that she will have to plan and work and sacrifice if she is to save her soul alive. Having come that far, there is a chance that she may also learn, before it is too late, that it is not easy to be “too proud to fight.”

XX

## CHAPTER EIGHT

XX

### I

IMPLICIT in most of what I have written is the assumption that the simpler life of the small town and the countryside is *in itself* more desirable than the life of the giant city. This is an assumption, I know, which many readers will not accept. Before trying to draw together the rambling comments in Part Two of my book, before showing what light I think they shed on American Culture, I must discuss this unexamined premise.

It would not be reasonable to rejoice, as I do, at signs that America is remembering her old dream, that she is getting ready to demand that the dream be taken seriously, unless I felt that the system of concentrated power, of a proletarianized nation, was morally ugly as well as politically and economically unsound. In Part One I gave the political argument against a dispossessed nation: that such a nation cannot know freedom or equality or democracy. But it is possible to answer, as much of Europe has done, that freedom and equality and democracy do not matter, that the important thing is to make sure that the giant factories grow bigger and bigger, so that more and more goods may be made by less and less men.

Even if it were admitted, however, that freedom and democracy are not as important as we think, it would still be true that the dispossessed nation, littered with giant cities and giant factories, would be morally ugly. I shall give my reasons for this dogmatic statement before closing my comments on American Culture—for the statement and the Culture are closely related.



Carlyle said that the mark of the hero, of the truly great man, was that the Great Facts of Existence always stared him in the face. The great man can never turn his back on the great questions; he can never take life for granted; he must always try to understand, to think creatively. Similarly, the mark of a balanced man, a man with some inner peace and mental stability—the normal good citizen of a healthy state—is that the Great Facts of Existence are at least sometimes present to his mind. He knows that there is more to life than the mechanical routine of his days, and there are times when that “more” is the one thing that matters. It does not obsess him, but neither does he deny it, thereby denying his soul. He knows what it means to be thoughtful. Men of this type tend to be produced by relatively simple, relatively human, conditions of life. They are a Culture-type; they are not encouraged by the clever, busy superficiality of the “civilized” world. Perhaps the most thoughtful man America has borne was Lincoln; he could not have been bred in a world-city. Thoughtfulness and wisdom are not a question of leisure. The farmer or the village carpenter may work more hours than the subway guard or the clerk in a Broadway soda-fountain. But the work of the farmer and the carpenter directs their attention from time to time toward those Great Facts of Existence, leads them from time to time to face the questions that a man must consider if he is to save his balance. The subway guard and the soda-clerk are given no such aid. That is the root difference between a healthy life and a life which tends to disintegrate the spirit. Nothing can make up for the lack of this kind of health. If our daily life is such that it turns men’s minds from the Great Facts and the Great Questions, tending to make men feel there are no such things, we are lost—and we cannot save ourselves by inventing more and more ingenious machines.

Mr. John Chamberlain, reviewing a farm-novel in the *New York Times*, expresses the common feeling that there is something insincere about praising simplicity as a good in itself.

The United States [says Mr. Chamberlain with a mild impatience] just won't accept an urban destiny. For, although most of our novel readers are at least one generation removed from ugly contact with earthworms and cutworms, they flock to the rental libraries to take out books which tend to identify all goodness and virtue with hoeing and building stone walls and raising your own food supply. . . . American country fiction, which by a law of natural selection is written to please, begins to glow with all the varieties of romantic colours. . . . Because of a distaste for the sort of romance that comes as easy as looking at a sunset in memory, this column had about decided to give up on belletristic bucolics.

Admitting that Mr. Chamberlain is right in saying that much country fiction is sentimental, I still believe that there is more to this drift of popular taste than Mr. Chamberlain sees. I believe there is more than he sees to his own first sentence: "The United States just won't accept an urban destiny." That statement does not need to be taken sarcastically; it is quite possible that it may be true. It is proper, of course, for Mr. Chamberlain to poke fun at the people whose revolt against an urban destiny takes the sole form of reading rosy novels about the soil. But if such people, instead of being an isolated trivial group, are really the sentimental fringe of a serious movement, the United States may still surprise Mr. Chamberlain by *not* accepting an urban destiny.

Praise for a more simple form of life than is possible in a big business Civilization sounds insincere and faddish in a world which has trained itself to believe that big business is progress and that progress is the path to the earthly paradise. The praise, however, takes on

dignity and weight when one remembers that the great thinkers of the world—in politics, philosophy, religion—have almost unanimously endorsed it.

In the Bible it is the big cities of trade, such as Tyre and Sidon, that are chosen as types of evil. The parables of the New Testament are put in terms of farming, fishing, and the handicrafts. The Christian authors, such as Aquinas and Thomas More; the classical authors, such as Aristotle, Virgil, and Tacitus; modern state-builders, from our own Fathers on the liberal side to men like Napoleon and Mussolini on the side of autocracy—all are in agreement that a dispossessed nation which has accepted "an urban destiny" is a nation on the way to ruin. The one enduring institution in the white man's world has had no doubts on this point since the dawn of Europe. From St. Thomas to St. Antonino, the medieval doctors developed the thesis that property in the means of production should be in the largest possible number of hands (which means, in Bryan's terms, an economy of the farm, the village, and the country town); and in 1891, when Europe for the better part of a century had suffered the benefits of concentrated capital and dispossessed labour, Pope Leo XIII. still taught the same doctrine. "The law," he wrote, "should favour ownership, and its policy should be to induce as many people as possible to become owners."

The facts surely suggest that we are not a group of wilful eccentrics—those of us who believe in the little man, in real private property, in a system of production organized so far as possible on a human scale. We are not timorously fleeing from a new and finer life. We are reminding our contemporaries that the "new" life, the "new" organization of society into a few real owners and an army of the dispossessed, is something which has appeared on earth many times before, is something which the honoured teachers of our race have condemned from

the start. If we exclude communists (who feel that the evils of concentrated property can only be cured by abolishing property entirely), there are no dissentient voices among the peers of the men I named. There are a number of rich men, who think their system is too lovely, but who may have trouble getting into heaven; and there is Mr. Brisbane, who speaks well of Pittsburg.

All this, of course, is an appeal to authority. It does not prove anything. But a charge of moral ugliness cannot be proved objectively. It can only be supported with arguments which seek to satisfy the imagination. And the imagination, I think, is made more friendly by remembering that it is not a little cult of world-escapers, but the great men of our whole tradition, who charge that a world of giant cities and propertyless workers must lead to a diminished life.

The grounds for this common opinion can be briefly stated. In secular terms a social order promotes well-being if it makes for contentment and happiness; in religious terms it promotes well-being if it makes for salvation. But in all societies, and in terms of common humanity, the essence of well-being for the individual is an inner peace, a harmony that comes to those who feel at home in this world and at rest about the next. Lacking this harmony, a man is at war with himself. Whether he pictures the purpose of living as enjoyment or as salvation, the further he is from inner peace the less likely he is to attain his end.

It cannot, I think, be claimed that this inner peace is gained by a simple abundance of goods. If this claim could be made, and supported, then economics would be the whole art of government, and whatever social order promised to maximize the creation of goods would be the order at which to aim. But such a statement, in the modern world, denies itself. We have tested the statement and we have seen it prove a lie. During the 1920's

the production of goods in America increased notably. Yet no one will claim that the group in society which benefited most by that increase, the group which grew richest during those turgid years, was distinguished for its inner peace. It gave no outward signs of that harmony that comes from inward grace.

This is not to deny that a rising standard of welfare, and the rising standard of health that will accompany it, makes for social well-being. It does. And such a rising standard is one of the aims of a good social order. But the modern world has proven to its grief that this is neither the sole nor the most important aim. The century during which, with marked success, we have gone "all out" for wealth has seen the decay of inner peace, of contentment with life.<sup>1</sup> A dominant note in the literature of the Western world, since about 1850, is the increasing cry of disillusion. To-day it is no longer fashionable to cry, but our sophisticated authors aim at a gloomy indifference, a proud refusal to let life break them down, which suggests a red Indian at the stake.

At the beginning of this long descent stood Baudelaire. One of the great poets, he had to express an age when all purpose, all significance, was vanishing from life. But this process of devaluation was still new; men had not yet learned to take it as a matter of course; men were indignant that the world, of which they had heard such good reports, should prove so barren and degraded. Baudelaire is the poet of this indignation. His verses are a studied, stylized insult thrown in the face of life. At the best they have a Dantesque power. They are so strong that their effect—almost in spite of Baudelaire—is not negative, not destructive. The reader feels that this concentration of rage, this sharp fiery bitterness, is

<sup>1</sup> The striking fact is that this decay has been most marked in just that section of society which has really known a rising standard of physical welfare.

really an affirmation of the soul. No one could pour such energy and such precision into hating life unless he was comparing it to a noble vision of what it ought to be. And if a man could still remember such a vision, the world might still be remedied. It is the difference between indignation and despair.

In the early days of disillusion there was much talk among left-over romantics about Love as a last remedy for life when all else had gone bad. Baudelaire was not taken in by this foolishness. He knew, with all his intensity of awareness, that if meaning went out of life at its centre, love would become as much of an indignity as every other natural process—as undignified and as unavoidable.

*Vous êtes un beau ciel d'automne, clair et rose !  
Mais la tristesse en moi monte comme la mer,  
Et laisse, en refluant, sur ma lèvre morose  
Le souvenir cuisant de son limon amer.*

*Ta main se glissé en vain sur mon sein qui se pâme.  
Ce qu'elle cherche, amie, est un lieu saccagé  
Par la griffe et la dent féroce de la femme.  
Ne cherchez plus mon coeur ; les bêtes l'ont mangé.*

*Mon coeur est un palais flétri par la cobue ;  
On s'y soûle, on s'y tue, on s'y prend aux cheveux !  
—Un parfum nage autour de votre gorge nue ! . . .*

*O Beauté, due fléau des âmes, tu le veux !  
Avec tes yeux de feu, brillants comme des fêtes,  
Calcine ces lambeaux qu'ont épargnés les bêtes !*

Here is the meaninglessness of life dramatized in a man's motiveless abandonment to physical want at the very moment he was telling how it disgusted him.

*—Un parfum nage autour de votre gorge nue ! . . .*

The line is a tormented cry of pain and pleasure indistinguishable. Yet it is interesting to see that for Baudelaire there are still some *lambeaux qu'ont épargnés les bêtes*. There are none, when we turn to the contemporary

world, and to Mr. Aldous Huxley as its representative. The last protecting rag is gone. In the bright and bitter light of Mr. Huxley's disdain humanity stands bare and horrible.

*O monstruosités pleurant leur vêtement !*

Mr. Huxley does not make the mistake of attacking life with such strength and poetic fire that the very attack is a kind of defence. In his most revealing book, *Texts and Pretexts*, he has not even paid the world the compliment of writing the book himself. He has chosen from the poets a number of passages that interest him and has strung them together with prose commentaries of his own. Often the commentaries point out how silly the poet was, sometimes they admit that he was really on the right track, sometimes the poem is used as an excuse for Mr. Huxley's musings. The result is always pointed, deadly, fascinating to read. The book as a whole represents the most extreme disintegration of standards and principles that Civilization has yet produced.

In his Introduction Mr. Huxley says,

The Ideal Man of the eighteenth century was the Rationalist; of the seventeenth, the Christian Stoic; of the Renaissance, the Free Individual; of the Middle Ages, the Contemplative Saint. And what is our Ideal Man? On what grand and luminous mythological figure does contemporary humanity attempt to model itself? The question is embarrassing. Nobody knows.

From that lucid and unencouraging beginning the book goes on its corrosive way, ending with the following paragraph :

If we must play the theological game, let us never forget that it is a game. Religion, it seems to me, can survive only as a consciously accepted system of make-believe. People will accept certain theological statements about life and the world,

will elect to perform certain rites and to follow certain rules of conduct, not because they imagine the statements to be true or the rules and rites to be divinely dictated, but simply because they have discovered experimentally that to live in a certain ritual rhythm, under certain ethical restraints, and as if certain metaphysical doctrines were true, is to live nobly, with style. Every art has its conventions, which every artist must accept. The greatest, the most important of the arts, is living.

I think that must be the extreme expression of modern nihilism. To live nobly, says Mr. Huxley, is to live with style. To live with style is to live on hollow forms, for the style has been emptied of content, and all men know it has been emptied of content. It expresses nothing. It is a "consciously accepted system of make-believe." And the reason the system is "consciously accepted" is that men have learned by experiment that life moves less awkwardly if it has "a certain ritual rhythm."

In literature Mr. Huxley has no sympathy with empty style. He speaks contemptuously of D'Annunzio and Swinburne on the ground that with them "the gift of saying exists alone, in strange divorce from the gift of seeing and understanding." But in his life, whether he likes it or not, he has got to accept style without content—emptiness, make-believe, mere "ritual rhythm." He has got to accept it since that is all his eager and honest mind has found in life. But he does not have to use the phrase, "to live nobly," in connection with this thin pretence. It is one of the few times when he has used an overflattering expression.

Mr. Huxley has no choice but to show the world as he sees it. He is a civilized man, rootless, faithless, too well inured to indifference to know the hot anger of a Baudelaire. His mind is precise and clear. We owe him gratitude for expressing the world in which so many people live to-day. Nothing is more unreasonable than to help create such a world, to admire and defend its most



characteristic features, and then to turn on the artist who mirrors it and abuse him for having an ugly mind. Yet this is what many people do. They think the modern big city is fine; they would not tamper in any way with "progress"; yet they insist that men like Joyce or Faulkner or Hemingway should write more attractively. If an artist expresses anything at all he shows whether his world has attained that inner peace, that harmony, which is the gauge of success in living. Our artists, being expressive, show with harsh clarity that we live in an age of inner war. Instead of seeking to rectify the world, most of our moralists would be content to silence the artists.

This life of growing triviality, of deepening insignificance, from the time of Baudelaire to the time of Aldous Huxley—this is the Dark Tower to which our Western world has come after a hundred eager years of progress. In terms of the secular world we have not found contentment or happiness; in terms of the next world we have not found salvation. Are we still so pleased with the result that we think there must be something sentimental about any man who fights our "urban destiny"? Do we still believe it would be "turning back the clock" if we listened for a moment to what all the chosen teachers of our race have said: that most men cannot be at peace with themselves when living in huge cities where the homeliest details of life are dehumanized; when living in an economic system built on an inhuman scale and an inhuman abstractness; when the daily work of their hands is perfunctory and uncreative; when the standard of security is that of a man working too fast on a factory-job that is too dull and with a foreman to remind him of the grim line of the unemployed outside the gates. Conditions such as these have ruined every previous world where they have appeared. And we have had time

to watch our world, as it gradually accepted these conditions, grow more and more bitter and criminal, more and more tough and cruel, more and more neurotic and unstable, more loose, more sexually perverted, more suicidal. Our painters take refuge in a madhouse of abstract shapes; our authors show us a human race more helpless but not more moral than the animals; our churches put on moving picture shows in the hope that then they may not be quite empty. And still we talk about the sentimentality, or the unreality, of anyone who says that such life is not good enough, that we must build here in America a social order where men can live more simply, on a human scale, with work that is creative—where men can save their minds and save their souls, even if they never erect a building a mile high.

If, as I think, we can make such a world without relinquishing any of the real benefits of the machine, so much the better. If not, I should think we might reasonably prefer our sanity to our gadgets. To be sure, the Civilization-man would deny that a choice exists. He would claim that any alleviation of our lot, any change which might make life more humane, is a "step back," and that steps back are forbidden. The strength and persistence of this seemingly senseless view suggests that the Civilization-man is seized by the fascination described by Spengler:

No wretchedness [he writes when describing the world city] no compulsion, not even a clear vision of the madness of this development, avails to neutralize the attractive force of these daemonic creations. . . . "Time" is no abstract phrase, but a name for the actuality of Irreversibility. Here there is only forward, never back. Long, long ago the country bore the country-town and nourished it with her best blood. Now the giant city sucks the country dry, insatiably and incessantly demanding and devouring fresh streams of men, till it wearies and dies in the midst of an almost uninhabited waste of country. Once the full sinful beauty of this last marvel of all history has

captured a victim, it never lets him go. Primitive folk can loose themselves from the soil and wander, but the intellectual nomad never. Homesickness for the great city is keener than any other nostalgia. Home is for him any one of these giant cities, but even the nearest village is alien territory. He would sooner die upon the pavement than go "back" to the land. Even disgust at this pretentiousness, weariness of the thousand-hued glitter, the *taedium vitae* that in the end overcomes many, does not set them free. They take the City with them into the mountains or on the sea. They have lost the country within themselves and will never regain it outside.

This is a true description of the man who has been seized by "the full sinful beauty of this last marvel of all history," the man who has "lost the country within himself" and who is therefore caught by Civilization. There is probably some form of rebirth which can save a man even from this fate, but it would have to be on the scale of a religious conversion. If it be true, as Spengler thinks, that throughout Western Europe the majority of the people has made the change from Culture to Civilization, has been caught by this sinful beauty, then Spengler's dogma—"here there is only forward, never back"—may be a safe working rule. But in America the shift from Culture to Civilization has only begun; it has not yet overwhelmed the mass of the people. If Americans define the danger in time, if they learn that along that path lies death rather than progress, there is no fate, no "iron law," no inner compulsion, that need drive them on that desperate way. The heart of America still wants a chance to build a Culture, if the mind of America can provide the knowledge and the leadership.

## 2

It is this last statement—that America still wants a chance to build her Culture—which I have tried in this chapter to give reasons for believing. America has gone

a long way toward the dispossessed state. But the mass of Americans have not yet approved this direction. They have protested, and their protests have been silenced with the twin assurances that such progress was necessary and that in the end it would make everyone more wealthy. Both these assurances were untrue; but for a long time the American public had no chance to discover that. Lately, however, they are beginning to suspect that their vaunted "progress" is enslaving them rather than making them wealthy, and that such an end to the American experiment is only necessary on the base assumption that there is no efficient human impulse except greed. As these suspicions dawn, the American people are seized with a strange hope. It comes to them with a new excitement that there may still be much to be proud of in America. They have wanted such pride for years. Failing it they have been driven to threadbare substitutes: boosting their home-town, "putting over" a smart deal, owning a Packard instead of a Chevrolet, feeling superior to Europe where there are less bath-tubs, or where less freight is moved less miles, watching New York catch up on London in the population race, or watching Chicago catch up on New York. If people are denied a proper pride they will have one that is vain and boastful. And through dreary years American leaders had but one test for action: nothing must be allowed to interfere with "prosperity"; no questions were to be taken seriously if the answers might tend to distract people from what was called "growing great."

Whenever it is accepted without further inquiry, as a fatal objection to any political proposal, that someone might lose money if it were put into effect; and whenever it is not even accepted as a practical criticism of such a proposal, that its moral evil overbalances its economic good—whenever these two things happen, it is fair to say that the state is deeply sick. For a long time America

has done nothing to protect freedom, to protect democracy, to protect equality, for fear that anything she did might hurt profits. If Americans are to renew their pride in their country they must reverse this plan. A state that does not dare take a moral stand for fear the very rich might disapprove is a state that will not survive.

"A Government which is afraid to oppress the strong will never discharge its obligation to protect the weak; the appetite of the few for power warring against the cry of the many for justice is the constant refrain of political history."<sup>1</sup> It is only when the power of the state, in this endless war, is used predominantly on the side of justice, and in accord with well-defined principles, that men whole-heartedly love their country. It has been written that it is sweet and proper to die for one's country; and this is true—but only when the country has a moral, in addition to an economic, purpose. It will be found that fewer and fewer men choose to die for a nation whose power is used primarily to make sure that the rich are not incommoded by the demands of humanity. It is nice that Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan and Mr. Charles Mitchell<sup>2</sup> should, during a troublesome year, be free of income tax; but that is not the kind of freedom for which men greet death with a song.

In the long run people may get the leadership they deserve, but it is my basic faith that Americans deserve better than they have recently received. As the gold plate peels off the America that was built during the 'twenties, the people are not frightened; they are not even angry; the astonishing thing about them is that so many seem to be relieved. A burden of false hopes seems to have been lifted—a burden of ambitions which were half-felt to be unsatisfying even if achieved. And with that weight lifted Americans are beginning to wonder,

<sup>1</sup> Douglas Jerrold, *England*, p. 240.

<sup>2</sup> Late head of the National City Bank of New York.

not how they can get yesterday back again with the gold-plate a bit more durable, but how they can get something that bears a real resemblance to the American dream. It is that fact which makes it seem probable that America can still (with luck and leadership) develop her Culture. The people whose only hope is to get back to the 'twenties are Civilization-men; the "sinful beauty," described by Spengler, has snared them, and nothing else will do. Such people are in a small minority to-day.

In the end it must come to the old question: can a nation follow an ideal, can it build a life in which true pride is justified, without the help of a more effective religion than we find in America? Is it possible really to believe,

*Vanitas est diligere quod cum omni celeritate transit;*

unless you can add,

*Et illic non festinare ubi sempiternum gaudium manet.*

If the "everlasting joy" is felt to be what Mr. Huxley calls "a consciously accepted system of make believe," can there be strength to resist the well-known temptations of the world? I do not think the question can be answered in advance; but if the coming boom is as rich and riotous as seems likely, the world will learn whether Americans are serious about their newly-remembered dream.

Throughout this chapter, in giving reasons for the hopefulness I feel, I have said almost nothing about the American proletariat. My "civilized" friends may feel that this alone is reason for dismissing my hopefulness as just another example of world-flight. But the reason I have not discussed the American proletariat is that I do not think many of them are truly proletarian. Economically they are as proletarian as the dismal men of Manchester: they are dispossessed;

they have learned the bitterness of insecurity; they know there is something basically unfair about their plight. But their state of mind is not yet proletarian; it is still bourgeois. They still want to own. They would still prefer to have their small store or farm or workshop than to have greater wealth, more goods for consumption, in a highly organized, sternly dictated ant-heap. Now is the last chance to help them to what they want. If their leaders leave them dispossessed, insecure, underprivileged, it will not be long before they begin to think according to the Marxian patterns. It is that hour for which the communists are waiting.

The political form in which American Culture will grow, if it grows at all, is laid down in the Creed with which I began this division of the book. Self-government, equality, freedom, humanity: these concepts, though relative, can mean a great deal, or they can mean, as at present, almost nothing. They must mean a great deal if America is to mean anything at all. Here, then, is the basic demand; nothing less can satisfy those who still take America seriously. And yet—to make these concepts real Americans must effect a partial transfer of power. So an important question is this—are those whom I call the “real” Americans a vanishing race, fated to follow the red Indians into limbo, or are they perhaps as representative as they think they are?

PART THREE  
AMERICAN POLITICS TO-DAY

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## CHAPTER NINE

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### I

POLITICAL parties in America to-day have little meaning in terms of political thought. It is not possible to say, "The Republicans think this," or "The Democrats think that." It all depends on which Republicans you are talking about, or which Democrats. Before trying to explain the parties, therefore, it is necessary to describe the main points of view which are beginning to take form behind the false fronts of party solidarity. The groups which are now jockeying for position in America can be classified economically as follows :

1. Those who still have a pure Hamiltonian attitude toward finance capitalism, who still admire private enterprise above all else and still feel there must be some way of managing a monopolistic system so that America can have exciting runs for her money during good times, followed by slumps which will not be too destructive. If the price of liberty is widespread private property (which means a certain control over private enterprise), these people do not care for liberty. If the price of democracy is the same, they do not care for democracy.

Perhaps the majority of well-to-do men and women in America's big cities belong to this group. It is the Republican Party from Grant to Mr. Hoover. It is probably not the Republican Party of the future. The party will use this group, of course, to help it back to power. But if it gets to power it will not dare be the same old party.

2. Those who believe in a form of state capitalism. This group has no quarrel with monopolies as such. It believes the robber barons served a useful purpose in building up the great financial and industrial monopolies, and that there only remains the task of controlling the use of those monopolies (while leaving them in private hands) in such a way as to give security and a fair standard of living to every citizen.

This group has no objection to seeing America become a dispossessed nation, providing it becomes a relatively rich nation at the same time. It has no objection to state supervision over practically the whole range of life, providing the supervision is accurate and the supervisors play no favourites. This group is made up of the capitalist collectivists, who meet the Marxian collectivists on their own ground, merely promising a more efficient and more prosperous ant-heap than the communists hope to organize. There are many Republicans in this group, and many Democrats. This group has sought to capture the official Democratic Party, but so far it has failed.

3. The followers of the "American Messiahs," who use all the good old American catchwords of liberty and freedom, but whose basic belief is in the myth of an Age of Plenty. They believe the machine is now ready to make all Americans rich, if the government would only create enough money and scatter it generously enough among all classes of society. Their political doctrines range from a vague socialism on the Left to an extreme form of state-regulated private monopolies on the Right. Their common ground is the conviction that it is only lack of efficient organization and lack of an abundant supply of cheap money which prevent the machine from restoring man, over-night, to his lost Eden. The late Senator Long (with his slogan "Every Man a King"), Father Coughlin (with his money heresies),

Dr. Townsend (with his plan for a pension of \$200 a month for every citizen over sixty), and Mr. Upton Sinclair (with his semi-socialist Utopia), are representative of this group. Because its promises are magnificent, and its ideas so slight that they are easy to grasp and hard to refute, this group has a large following. It is so unanimously wrong, however, that in the unlikely event of its getting into power it must provoke a crash from which only dictatorship could rescue America.

4. The communists, with whom I include the less extreme advocates of production for use. In the near future this group cannot hope to gain control. Its political importance is twofold. In the first place, it represents an honest group of men with an economic programme which at least has coherence. It may prove useful, therefore, in forcing the others to do some thinking, and in showing that dedication to a cause and moral earnestness are not outmoded. And, in the second place, the communists may be used effectively as a bogeyman by the friends of monopoly capitalism. People like Mr. Hearst will tell the Americans, in an ever louder tone of voice, that the communists are a great menace, and that the only way to ward them off is to set up a government of firm patrioteers. If the people who repeat this lie have control of every agency for forming opinion, the American people will sooner or later believe what they hear. But the communists are not a menace to America. At the moment they are an inconsiderable minority. If they grow strong enough to have any hope of seizing power it will not be because of wickedness on their part; it will be because they are honest men, with a moral purpose, who know what they want, and because the rest of America fails to match them on any of those points. In that case, it would seem that the communists had a right to triumph.

5. Those who believe that they can still save the

true American system of private property, and who believe that together with real private property they can save freedom, save democracy, making America as good a nation as can be found in a not wholly satisfying world.

This group has at least two representatives in Mr. Roosevelt's Cabinet: the Secretary of Agriculture, Mr. Wallace, and the Secretary of the Interior, Mr. Ickes. But the real strength of this group (assuming that it has strength in terms of practical politics, which has yet to be proved) lies with the people. The programme of this fifth group is not one which can be imposed from above. It must be demanded by the plain man, for it is a programme which for the most part will have to be carried out by the people, with help from Washington, but with no coercion.

Scattered throughout America is a considerable group of authors, journalists, and lecturers, which is trying to popularize this programme, trying to arouse the people to demand it. The group is having a success which merits attention.<sup>1</sup> So far, it has not become an influence in party politics, so its activities tend to be ignored by political journalists. Nevertheless, the answer to the main question posed by this book—whether America is destined to have a worthy place in world history—depends upon whether or not this fifth group succeeds in getting its way; therefore, before discussing the other groups in terms of the immediate political scene, I shall turn aside for a discussion of the plans, and the chances, of group five.

## 2

"An appealing idea, but it's impractical. There's no way of making it come true." This is the standard criticism from people who oppose the whole idea of

<sup>1</sup> Cp. *Who Owns America?* Boston, 1936, for example of this group's activities.

reviving American democracy. Few of the opponents of this plan—even among communists, even among the very rich—deny that the American dream has charm. The heart of America is still given to the ideal of a non-monopoly capitalism, the ideal of a land of small owners, independent, democratic, with a feeling of equality. But many of the best minds of America deny that such an ideal can ever again be attained, or even approximated. Some say that the attempt to make the American dream come true must lower the standard of living; some say that such an attempt means turning the back on progress; some say that Marx, or Spengler, or another prophet, has proved that there is only one possible future, and that the attempt to evade it is a form of weak-mindedness. Yet there is much in the modern world to suggest that these arguments are bad economics, bad politics, and bad history.

The one thing to beware of [writes a modern historian] is *practical politics*. The practical work of the world is not done by politicians, and never will be. Politicians are concerned with theory, not with practice, because it is not their function to do the nation's work, but to provide the conditions which will be most favourable in the long run for those who have to do it.

The American politician, in other words, need not feel abashed merely because a man in Wall Street accuses him of being theoretical. A relevant question is whether his theories are sound or stupid. A still more relevant question is whether America might not be better off if the grass were growing knee-high in Wall Street. The problem of high politics is "to provide the conditions which will be most favourable in the long run for those who have to do the nation's work." And, as Mr. Bryan pointed out some years ago, the "practical man" in Wall Street tends to be a little narrow in his definition of the nation's workers:

The attorney in a country town is as much a business man as the corporation counsel in a great metropolis. The merchant at the cross-roads store is as much a business man as the merchant in New York. The farmer who goes forth in the morning and toils all day . . . is as much a business man as the man who goes upon the board of trade and bets upon the price of grain.

Keeping in mind this broader definition of the business man, and hence of the "practical affairs" of life, it would seem that the American who favours the historic American plan need not feel too discouraged if someone points out that his programme must earn the hostility, or even the contempt, of the man who bets upon the price of grain. Such an American may continue to think that the conditions which are most favourable in the long run to the vast majority of Americans deserve his allegiance, and if need be his life. He may continue to assert that one of the most discredited lies in history is the statement that to protect the prosperity of the grain-bettors is to promote the well-being of the plain man.

There are many Americans, however, who believe that if the attempt to revive the traditional virtues of their country were made, it might very well work, but who insist that no such programme could ever be given a fair chance because of the mysterious and deadly power of Big Business. Big Business, these people say, if it were seriously threatened, would stage a fight that would startle the retired heroes in Valhalla. Big Business would conjure fascism from the vasty deep. Big Business, if the worst came to the worst, would destroy the economic system and bring on the Twilight of the West. This is all very romantic; but it is worth remembering that on the only recent occasion when Big Business even thought it was threatened, it staged a fight that would not have startled a meadow-full of rabbits. In the difficult days of 1933 Big Business thought revolution was in the air. Did it arise in its virility to show the American people

who were the Lords and Masters? Did it bluster across the stage in robber-baron fashion, recalling

The unregenerate passions of a day  
When treacherous queens, with death upon the tread,  
Heedless and wilful, took their knights to bed?

That hardly seemed to be the mood of Big Business in those days. Instead, it gave the world the unusually pleasing sight of timid old men in New York moving their gold to Switzerland or Great Britain, provisioning their yachts for a fast and long retreat, planning doubtless to buy some distant island where they would not have to face anything more outrageous than an occasional horse-shoe crab. The great lords of banking, who are said to hold the modern world in the palms of their hands, were as gentle as a hearth-side of altered cats. They asked the government please to save them, please to *protect them from the alleged anger of the public*. They promised to be as good as gold, or even as good as silver if that was what the people wanted. They resorted to the last refuge of the poltroon: they laughed amiably at the most savage jokes against themselves.

Of course, now that the government has removed them from the soup, they meet in convention in Louisiana and make daring faces at Washington. I do not think Washington is very frightened; I am certain the American people are not frightened at all.

If the American people have an outstanding characteristic, it is a tendency to violence and disrespectfulness, a tendency to meet the most dignified assertions of authority with "What the hell!" If these people ever decide they want something, they will not be headed off by anyone so readily frightened as their robber rabbits.

The important question is not whether the American people can overcome the opposition of Big Business, but



whether they can gather themselves together to demand the sort of programme that might redeem them.

Even if the House of Morgan were definitely angry at them, I can imagine that the American people might still get their way. Even if Mr. Henry Ford were to launch a thousand ships, each one as remarkable as the *Oscar II*, I can imagine that the American people might still be unterrified. Their real danger is from people like the late Huey Long, or the amiable Doctor Townsend. If fascism comes to America, it will not come as the result of a comic opera *putsch* in which Wall Street buys an ex-general of marines to lead a march on Washington. It will come as it came to Europe, as a revolt of the lower middle class, of the people who want to be self-respecting proprietors, but who feel themselves dispossessed—proletarian in fact, but not in feeling. These people are easy game for the demagogue, for the man who will promise them the moon and promise it quickly, who will tell the desperate middle class that the problem of making them all kings, or all financially independent, is perfectly simple.

If the middle class is sufficiently desperate it will vote the demagogue into power. And when the demagogue comes to power he will find that his "age of plenty" is not so easy to provide. At that point tyranny is born. At that point the demagogue, threatened with a breakdown of the economic system, turns to the Lords and Masters whom he has been abusing, and makes a deal. The demagogue stays in office and keeps the people quiet. The Lords and Masters stay in power and run the system just the way they always wanted to run it. Fascist tyranny is monopoly capitalism made safe, monopoly capitalism with the whole power of society behind it. The plain man is fobbed off with subsistence wages, patriotism, and a uniform. If he is still restive, it is not hard to fling him some racial minority to torment.

The Jews do very nicely. In America the Negroes might also serve.

The important point to notice is that no such movement, in its early stages, can be engineered from on top. "From the streets to power," was Mussolini's motto—and Hitler's also. "From the rural slums to power" would serve as a description of Huey Long's career. Not until the wretched people have chosen their "Leader" does the time come when high finance can buy in on the ground floor. The people who are seeking to preserve America do not have to be afraid of Park Avenue or of Beacon Hill.<sup>1</sup> Sarcasm, or perhaps social disapproval, is the worst they need fear from those quarters. The *free farmer who has been reduced to share cropping*, the small-town shopkeeper who is now a part-time clerk in a chain store, the kindly old man from Iowa who went to Southern California for years of retirement and whose investments have now gone sour—these are the people who might sell America to fascism. If they do, the fault will be America's. For these are the very people who believe in the American dream. They will not turn against it unless there is no leader anywhere to offer them hope.

One of the first tasks of American leadership will be to banish the idea that America's Lords and Masters are a formidable crew. To be formidable they would need either principles or a plan—preferably both. Their attitude when brought face to face with the New Deal is proof they have neither. And why should they have? Mr. David Cushman Coyle has given a caustic summary of their talents.

During the big argument last spring [writes Mr. Coyle] a good many people got the impression that holding companies were primarily devices for sticking the consumer. There may

<sup>1</sup> The somewhat superior Park Avenue of Boston.

have been some of that, but mostly they were devices for sticking the investor. The main idea was to get so many layers of companies one on top of another that nobody could understand what was going on. Then the operators bought and sold stocks among the different layers, with some of the money falling off the table every time they pushed it around. The game was to carry off the basket at the end of the day.

That is an absorbing game, but it breeds neither morality nor thought. People bereft of both qualities can only gain power in a time of real crisis through mob appeal. The mob appeal of all the Morgan partners put together would not fill the lobby of a rather small town-hall. The fact that when the true mob orator comes to power he may have to sell out to Wall Street makes no difference, assuming that the mob-orator can be short-circuited in the first place. There lies the American problem.

There are two prerequisites for a peaceful reform in the economic and political institutions of a nation. First, there must be a public whose deepest feelings are sympathetic to the reformation. Second, there must be a group of leaders capable of appealing to those feelings, of organizing them and giving them conscious form, and later of carrying through the legal and technical changes required by the reformation. With these truisms in mind, let us consider the programme of group five, of the people who seek to restore American democracy by restoring private property.

The American public is unquestionably sympathetic to this reformation; but the sympathy is qualified, and to some extent nullified, by the fact that a majority of the public is sceptical as to whether the reformation can be brought about. The scepticism is usually based on one of two beliefs. The first is the belief I have already discussed: that Big Business is invincible. This belief, I think, is in the process of dissolution.

Nobody is invincible when he no longer believes in himself. When disaster fell on America, Big Business did not say, "Leave us alone—we know the answer—we'll soon pull you out." On the contrary, it said, "Save us—we don't know the answer—perhaps we have sinned, but protect us from shouldering the blame." From that moment a great many Americans realized that Big Business was king only until someone came along who knew what he wanted, and who had the nerve to point out that the king was bare and none too pretty.

The second reason for scepticism is more important. A large number of Americans believe there is such a thing as economic law in the sense that there are certain mechanical tendencies in life which cannot be thwarted. And they believe that one of these mechanical tendencies is the development of small-scale capitalism (the true-property state) into monopoly capitalism (the state divided into a few plutocrats and a large number of proletarians). They say this has happened all over the Western world, and that it is nonsense to talk about reversing the process.

This argument from economic law, though trashy, is felt to have great weight by most Americans. The only encouraging thing about the situation is the ease with which the argument can be refuted. The recent history of the Scandinavian countries, alone, is enough to show how man's free will can blow this so-called economic law sky-high.

Twenty years ago Sweden was a good example of the "inevitable" doom of all capitalist states to drift toward monopoly. The cartel system, huge trusts—some of them international in scope—had an almost complete control over trade in the principal commodities. And, as usual, the monopolies maintained extortionate prices.

At that point the Swedish people decided they wished to be free men and women, and they had the impudence

to rise against their Lords and Masters. They undertook a three-fold programme: (1) They admitted that the basic utilities could best be operated on a scale so large as to make for monopoly. In these utilities, therefore, they set up government-owned units to compete with privately owned units, to act as "yardsticks" to measure true costs, thus insuring that the privately owned units could not racketeer at the expense of the public.<sup>1</sup> (2) As producers, in other fields than that of the basic utilities, the Swedes undertook either to own their means of production individually or in co-operation with other actual working producers, thus insuring themselves both freedom and a proper return for their labour. (3) As consumers, the Swedes organized with fellow-consumers into co-operative societies, both in order to support the small producers during price-cutting wars carried on by the Trusts, and to insure that their cash incomes would go as far as possible.

Swedish Big Business, of course, was displeased. Swedish Big Business undertook to fight this foolish attempt to turn the clock back. But instead of fighting with the combined brilliance and brutality which Americans attribute to their Lords and Masters, Swedish Big Business fought with the foolishness and timidity which the American Lords and Masters also display.

The effect upon the Trusts of small-scale production (whether by co-operatives or by individual owners), and of the honest competition which resulted from small-scale production, teaches a lesson to the whole modern world, and especially to America.

<sup>1</sup> In America, the Tennessee Valley Project—one of the most important acts of Mr. Roosevelt's administration—involves just this use of a government-owned electric power plant to act as a "yardstick" demonstrating the extent to which the Power monopoly has rigged the market. It is an interesting fact that Senator George Norris, responsible for many of the details of the Tennessee Valley Act, is a student of modern Scandinavian affairs.

The first war between the "little man" and the Trusts came in the margarine business. The consumers' co-operatives had been making themselves a nuisance to the organized retailers, and these retailers prevailed on their natural allies, the Trusts, to cut off supplies to the co-operatives. Margarine was the first important commodity which was refused to the co-operatives. At once the co-operative society passed the hat among its members, asking for money with which to build a margarine plant. The seemingly ludicrous sum of fifteen thousand dollars was raised, with which to fight a powerful Cartel.

With this small sum the co-operative society entered the field of margarine production, quickly proving that the product could be made and sold at a price substantially below the price established by the Cartel. It forced the Cartel to reduce its prices, and in a very few years it forced the Cartel to dissolve permanently—a sign that monopolies are not always an economic form of production.

Naturally, before the Cartel gave in to this fair and honest competition, it waged a price war. But the co-operatives were wise enough to exploit this war to the full for propaganda purposes—pointing out that it made a perfect demonstration of monopoly control of prices. The public was sensible enough to support the people who had introduced fair competition (and lower prices) into a field where monopolists had long had their way. The defeat of the Cartel was absolute.

Later, the co-operatives carried out similar ventures in flour and oatmeal mills (a field dominated by one of the most predatory Cartels in modern history), shoe factories, rubber-goods factories, fertilizer plants, and the manufacture of store equipment. When an experiment in genuine ownership starting with a capital of fifteen thousand dollars can compete with a monopoly so successfully that it drives the monopoly out of business, there

would seem to be something wrong with the "inevitable law" of bigness.

It is only by ignoring the Swedish experiment that American pessimists preserve the naïveté to say that history proves the impossibility of the American dream. And it is only by ignoring the same experiment (and also by never having moved in robber-baron circles) that anyone can keep the illusion of the invincibility of American big business-men.

I think it is fair, therefore, to make the following two statements:

1. The plain man in America still wants the American dream to come true.

2. The scepticism with which the American greets the statement that the dream can still come true is based chiefly upon two beliefs, both of which can be shown to be shaky.

From this I conclude that the first prerequisite for an economic and political reformation in America can be met. (I am not predicting that it will be met; I am concerned only to show that it is one of the possibilities for America's future. The American people can be brought to want this change, and to have faith in it.) What of the second prerequisite? What of the leadership? Before meeting this question I must consider, at least in outline, the programme which the leaders of such a movement would have to offer America.

### 3

The first step in making clear the programme is to get rid of certain misunderstandings which have plagued the movement in America and which may arise in the minds of foreign readers also if not contradicted. First, this is not primarily a back-to-land movement. (In England, a movement to restore real property must involve a considerable resettlement of the land. In America the land

has never been deserted ; but the farmer has too often been turned from a free owner into a tenant or a cropper. About seven-tenths of the men who work the American land are to-day non-owners.) Second, this is not a movement to return to technologically inefficient modes of manufacture. It is contended, and I think with justice, that the small business (in the fields where it is proposed to return to small businesses) will prove more efficient than the monopoly, as well as more desirable morally.

Believing, as this movement does, that there are moral and economic virtues in the institution of widespread property, and that monopoly capitalism is morally ugly as well as economically unsound, the practical proposals look toward the establishment of a genuine property state—that is, a state in which a considerable majority of the families participate in real ownership.

The problem of property can be divided, for convenience, into the problem of property in land and the problem of property in industry and the distributive trades.

That the dispossessed American farmer can be made once more into a real owner is proved by the success of similar reforms in Denmark, Sweden, and the South of Ireland. In fact, the change is facilitated in America by the bankruptcy of the one-crop system in the cotton and tobacco South. Tenantry and the one-crop system go hand in hand. It would have been hard to destroy tenantry and leave the one-crop system unimpaired. But the fact that the one-crop system in cotton and tobacco lands is in the process of being bankrupted by world conditions over which America has no control—that fact makes the abolition of the tenant system easier than it has been in the past.

When it comes to the problem of widely distributed ownership in industry, it is admitted that there are



certain industries and businesses in which such ownership is not feasible. Obvious examples would be railways, electric power, and other utilities. Here monopoly would seem to be necessary for full efficiency. In regard to these industries it is proposed to follow the plans of Mr. Roosevelt's administration: to set up, where public opinion will support the action, government-owned "yardsticks" to act as a measure, and at the same time to exercise government supervision over the permitted monopolies. The underlying principle is the obvious one that monopoly, where it is permitted in the common interest, is not, strictly speaking, private business at all, but a form of public service.

Over a large field of modern industry, however, it is not true that monopoly is efficient. From the engineer's point of view, the optimum size for most plants is the smallest size which can use the most modern machinery. Decentralized factories, producing for local use, on a scale where not more than a hundred people are involved in both management and labour, can be owned by the people directly concerned with them. The ownership would be real in the sense that the owners would have responsibility and control, so that the moral arguments in favour of property would at once become applicable. It is admitted that such decentralization of ownership as well as of plant would take time.

The question arises as to the degree of state intervention to be used in bringing about this programme. On this question the friends of the programme divide into two groups. The first group wants copious government intervention; its minimum programme would include differential taxation and control of new capital issues. The argument in favour of the latter proposal is that most big businesses have a short life-history. If new ones are prevented from growing up, the old ones will not long endure. Textiles, railways, coal—the blue chips

of yesterday are often the white elephants of to-day. It is contended, therefore, that if the amalgamation of existing businesses for purely financial purposes (as opposed to purposes of productive efficiency) were made impossible, the falsity of the so-called economic law of monopoly would quickly be proved. And such amalgamations, so far as the future is concerned, could easily be prevented by control over new capital issues.

Admitting all this, the group opposed to much government interference points out that no trust-busting acts have ever worked in the past, and that the Swedes have shown the proper way to break down trusts—not by passing laws against them, but by subjecting them to real competition and thus showing them up as uneconomic. Mr. Marquis W. Childs, in his admirable book on Sweden<sup>1</sup> writes :

In Sweden those who have been most active in the warfare against monopoly control of wealth and industry have never at any time relied upon the law; legal barriers against monopoly are entirely futile in the opinion of these practical leaders. Thus the directors of the co-operative movement carried on the fight against the trusts, directly on the firing line in wholesale and retail trade, not only for the practical advantage of the Co-operative Union but as a fundamental social duty.

The Swedes are a more disciplined people than the Americans, and a better-educated people. It seems improbable that the American public could wage such a successful fight against monopolies without the help of the federal government. In America, I believe, there will have to be action by the state. The question is whether that state action, when it comes, will be directed to the restoration of real property or to the abolition of all property. In the long run there is no third choice. Monopoly capitalism is a half-planned economy with all

<sup>1</sup> *Sweden : The Middle Way*. Yale University Press. 1936.

the vices of communism but none of the virtues. If the American people cannot have genuine property, genuine competition, and the freedom which comes with ownership, they will prefer a state planned by the communists for the good of the whole, rather than a state planned by robber barons for the good of one another.

There remains the question of small property in the distributive trades—the question of the small shopkeeper *vis-à-vis* the chain store. Wherever an industry has been decentralized, wherever the rule is local production for local use, the merchant who retails the product of that industry has been put in a position to compete with the chain store. In this particular the vast size of the United States plays into the hands of the little man—or would play into his hands if a system of honest competition were set up. For example, in a mass-production consumption-goods industry—such as the food industry—from a half to two-thirds of the price paid by the consumer is normally chargeable to advertising, high-pressure salesmanship, and physical distribution. The “efficiency” of the chain store comes from mass buying, which makes it possible to undercut a percentage of the advertising and distribution costs. The chain store would have no such advantage when buying from the local producer. In a system of local production of consumption goods the merchant becomes the expert buyer for the community—which is the economic purpose of the middleman and his final justification.

The following story suggests that in a giant country like the United States there are several useful by-products to the system of local production and of expert buying by the local merchant. Last year, in prosperous Westchester County (one of the richest suburbs to New York City), between eight hundred and twelve hundred people were suddenly poisoned as a result of eating cream puffs and chocolate éclairs. These had been bought from

Cushman's Sons, Inc., a chain-bakery. After investigation the authorities rightly insisted that Cushman's Sons, Inc., should not be prosecuted, since their bakeries were well-cared-for and hygienic. Little attention, however, was given to the fact that the eggs which caused all the trouble came from a national distributor in Chicago (a thousand miles away), that they were laid in Missouri (far south of Chicago), and that they were packed in Nebraska (five hundred miles west of Chicago and fifteen hundred miles from New York). Such a system of handling eggs is not only insanely uneconomic, but it must obviously result, from time to time, in a bit of mass poisoning. In between times it merely results in bad eggs.

With this general statement of the programme in mind, I can now return to my second prerequisite for a reformation in America. What of the leadership? One can say that scattered throughout America are many people who are doing their best to clear these issues, to arouse the public to the choice lying before the United States. And one can add that these people have a strong case. It is a strong case politically because the evidence is piling up that only by choosing real property can any nation build a system that is free and self-governing. It is a strong case economically because only the true-property state can provide the free market and free competition which form the alternative to a planned economy. It is a strong case historically because it conforms to the American tradition and because the Swedish people have shown that the property state can be made real in the modern world.

## 4

It is because this programme conforms to the American tradition that I have given it such extended treatment in a section devoted to present-day politics. None of the

important political leaders has yet sponsored this programme, so it is not possible to judge its strength by the usual tests. My own judgment, after eighteen months of lecturing throughout America, is that these ideas make a deep appeal, but that they may be sidetracked by the people who are promising to make America rich over-night. The salesmen for the so-called Age of Plenty have already attracted political support and won some competent political leaders. The people who are trying to interest America in a moral and political ideal in keeping with the facts of life have not yet been so fortunate. Their ideas, however, have at least begun to influence the official mind. I have mentioned Mr. Wallace and Mr. Ickes, members of the present Cabinet who are friendly to these ideas. And among the leaders of the Republican opposition, we find Mr. Ogden Mills, Secretary of the Treasury under ex-President Hoover, writing as follows :

I believe that a wide distribution of property is the greatest safeguard of a free society, and I would like to see so wide a distribution, among so large a proportion of the families of the country, as to combine security with freedom and to fix the character of society, making it neither Communist nor Fascist, but Proprietary.<sup>1</sup>

A re-alignment of parties will be one of the major phenomena of American politics between now and 1940. When the re-alignment is completed, when the armies of deserters from both camps, which are now jostling each other in the night, have finally come to rest where they belong, I believe that one of the major groups will be found representing this time-honoured American ideal.

<sup>1</sup> *Liberalism Fights On*, by Ogden Mills, New York, 1936.

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## CHAPTER TEN

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### I

TURNING to the major parties as they exist at the moment, what do the Democrats and the Republicans actually represent?

According to Republican orators that party now stands for conservatism, sound finance, the minimum of government interference with business, opposition to the centralization of too much power in Washington, the preservation of the Constitution of the United States, and economy. Each of these claims will repay examination.

The reader should remember that the Republican Party came into being just before the Civil War. At that time the country had been run for almost a generation by the Democratic Party, representing a combination of Southern and Western farmers. The Democratic Party had adopted the low tariff policy which was to the interest of American agriculture. It had also opposed the creation of a strong, unified banking system, on the ground that such a system would tend to drain the resources of the South and West into the financial and industrial centres in the East, creating a form of regional imperialism within the United States—an imperialism in which the South and West would play the part of exploited, raw-material-producing regions.

Both these policies of the Democratic Party were disliked by the financial and industrial interests. These interests were represented by the Whig Party, which

had the grave disadvantage of being too weak to win many elections. Also, as the slave-issue grew steadily more vexing during the late 'forties and the 'fifties, the Whigs were unable to agree on a common stand, and this, plus their long record of failure, led finally to their dissolution.

The most publicized fact about the new-born Republican Party was that it took a clear stand on slavery. Admitting that the federal government had no power to interfere with slavery in those States which chose to permit it, the Republican Party declared it was the duty of the federal government to prevent the introduction of slavery into any of the Western territories. As Lincoln put it, the Government must give the Western settler a clean bed with no snakes in it.

This seems like a reasonable stand; but there was more to the Republican Party than that. Back of the opposition to the spread of slavery was the opposition of finance and industry to the agricultural power. The slave-owners of the South and South-west had supplied most of the brains, and most of the effective leadership, of that power. If slaves, and thus slave-owners, could be kept out of the territories, those vast lands would be settled by Northerners, largely perhaps by New Englanders. Such settlers would have ties of sympathy with the Eastern money-power. As more and more territories settled by Northerners grew up to statehood and entered the Union, it might be expected that the long Southern domination in national politics would be broken.

The first promise of the new Republican Party, then, was opposition to the spread of slavery into the territories. And back of this promise lay the struggle between agriculture and industry for the control of the federal government. The second promise of the Republican Party was to promote the industrial interest by means of

a high protective tariff. Such a tariff must injure agriculture—so the same struggle between the two powerful groups in America lay behind this second promise. The third promise of the Republican Party was to throw the Western lands (once slaveholders had been excluded) open to free settlement under a Homestead Act. And the fourth promise of the Republican Party was to create a strong banking system under the supervision of the federal government.

Here was a powerful coalition of industry, finance, the anti-slavery group, and the land-hungry Northerners who wanted free farms. "Vote yourself a tariff" was the campaign slogan of Lincoln's party in the East; "*vote yourself a farm*" was the slogan in the West. It was hoped that this appeal, plus the emotional anti-slavery issue, would break the old Southern and Western alliance.

If the Democratic Party had held together, and all the Democratic votes cast in 1860 had been given to one candidate, Lincoln and the Republicans would have been defeated. But the Democrats split among themselves on the question of how far to go in opposing this Northern threat. They put three candidates in the field, with the result that Lincoln was elected.

Lincoln's election did not threaten any man's property in slaves. Lincoln and his party had promised never to interfere with slavery where it already existed. The secession of the South can only be understood if it is seen that behind Lincoln's election, behind the very existence of the Republican Party, lay the desire of Northern industry and finance to control the country in their own interest and to the disadvantage of the agricultural sections.

The agrarian South felt, irrespective of the slave-issue, that its power and prosperity could not survive the Republican policy. So it left the Union, but it



failed to take its Western allies with it. The alliance of South and West had for a generation been strong enough to run the country. Without the West, the South was not even strong enough to defend its own secession. There were three main reasons for the breakup of the alliance: first, the West was unwilling to side with the slave-owning South in a contest where the spread of slavery was at stake; second, the East had bought Western sympathy with the promise of a Homestead Act; third, the new railways had made the route to the East the main line of traffic for Western goods, instead of the old route to the South via the Mississippi.

The Republican Party kept its promises: it created a national banking system, it passed a Homestead Act, it gave the United States a high tariff. In addition to this it gained the prestige of being the party that saved the Union. To be sure, in the long run the Republican economic policies proved as destructive to agriculture as the South had foreseen; but in the short run the industrial expansion fostered by these policies was so exciting and gaudy, the illusion of progress was so heady, that only a few hardy recalcitrants were willing to say that the whole great change had been a mistake. The Democratic Party, which since the days of Jefferson had stood for the agrarian interest, began to lose its identity. It no longer believed in a low tariff, but only in a slightly lower one; it no longer opposed centralized finance, it merely wished to decentralize somewhat. The one conviction it clung to firmly was that the world would be a better place if there were more Democrats in office.<sup>1</sup>

From the time of the Civil War (which ended in 1865) until the election of Mr. Franklin Roosevelt in 1932, the

<sup>1</sup> Under Bryan's leadership, the party again sought to serve the interest of rural America; but the price of such firmness was a split in the party which prevented it from winning a national election.

Democrats only elected two Presidents. They had become a minority party in national affairs, a party which could elect Grover Cleveland to the presidency only because the country was disgusted (briefly) with Republican corruption, and which could elect Woodrow Wilson only because the Republicans were fighting among themselves.

During the 1920's it was often said that the Democratic Party was dying. The Republicans stood for Big Business triumphant, and for big finance. There was no room, it was said, for an opposition party standing for little business and for the farmer—such a party was an anachronism. Certainly there was no room for an opposition party which stood merely for Republican policies administered by Democrats. The Republican Party would absorb the Democratic Party and a new opposition would grow up from among the ranks of labour.

In 1928, when Mr. Hoover and Mr. Al Smith were the opposing candidates, this theory seemed to be confirmed. A hundred and twenty-eight years before, when Jefferson was elected President, his party of Southern agrarians had made an alliance with the political machine of New York City. That machine, led by elegant young careerists, was the first flower of political corruption in America—foreshadowing an abundant crop.

New York [wrote Henry Adams] in abandoning its alliance with New England in order to join Virginia and elect Jefferson to the Presidency, pledged itself to principles of no kind, least of all to Virginia doctrines. The Virginians aimed at maintaining a society so simple that purity should suffer no danger, and corruption gain no foothold; and never did America witness a stranger union than when Jefferson, the representative of ideal purity, allied himself with Aaron Burr, the Livingstones and Clintons, in the expectation of fixing the United States in a career of simplicity and virtue. . . . The political partnership . . . was from the first that of a business firm; and no more curious speculation could have been suggested to the politicians of 1800

than the question whether New York would corrupt Virginia, or Virginia would check the prosperity of New York.

From the time of its first victory, therefore, the Democratic Party was a rural, small-town party of the South and West which was glad to accept the votes of the big-city proletariat. In the days when the party had deep-felt principles and leaders who were wholly sincere, the city machines which organized and "delivered" the proletarian vote could never control the party policy in national affairs. But in 1928, in the days of the party's decline, when the old principles were widely felt to be outmoded, there came the first Presidential candidate from the sidewalks of New York: Mr. Al Smith, the idol of Tammany Hall. The wheel had come full circle; the city mob provided the leader of Mr. Jefferson's Party.

The results of the election were a sign that traditional America had not yet been abolished. The back-country had lost control over its own party, but it had not lost its ancient prejudice against the city "slicker". Mr. Smith—an honest man, with a good record, and one of the most appealing personalities in modern politics—was defeated overwhelmingly by a man with the charm of something out of Madame Tussaud's cellar. For the first time since the Civil War large sections of the "solid South" deserted the Democratic Party. An attempt was made to explain Mr. Smith's *débâcle* on the grounds that he was a Catholic. There is no doubt that his Catholicism was used as an argument against him throughout the South and much of the West. In my opinion that was an excuse rather than an argument. The Southern Democrat, who had never before faced the bizarre notion of voting the Republican ticket, would rather blame such an unseemly act on the Pope than on the bad taste of his own party.

That the Southern and Western Democrats who refused Al Smith were guided by a sound instinct was proved, to me at least, by Mr. Smith's speech at the Liberty League dinner in Washington, on January 25th, 1936. Mr. Smith started life as the champion of the dirt-poor in the New York City slums. I have heard him make many speeches to his down-and-out constituents; they are the best speeches I have heard from an American politician. And in his days as Governor of New York State there seemed no reason to suspect that the man was not as good as his words. But since his defeat in 1928—which closed his career in politics so far as the highest prizes are concerned—Mr. Smith has become the friend and pensioner of Big Business. His new friends have made him president of the depression's most gawky white elephant—the Empire State Building, the tallest building in the world, known as “the haunted house on Fifth Avenue” because someone saw a light in it one night. The Empire State Building is controlled by the du Pont family,<sup>1</sup> who are also the chief sponsors of the Liberty League. In January the League gave a much-publicized dinner in Washington. Mr. Smith was the chief speaker, his words being broadcast to the entire nation. There were more than a thousand guests at the dinner, including twelve du Ponts, and they represented the ultra-rich from all over the continent. I have never seen a more class-conscious audience, an audience more eager to be told that it represented all the virtue and valour of America, an audience more grimly suggestive of the impossibility of building an aristocracy on paper profits.

Al Smith stood before that audience, and to me it was painful to remember that there was a time when the plain people in New York City loved him. He was a disappointed man, using all the old mannerisms and all the

<sup>1</sup> Manufacturers of munitions and of cellophane.

old fire. And he got the old breath-taking cheers—but from a new audience, from a rabble of millionaires. And what he had to tell these new fanatical friends was the stalest doctrine of the nineteenth century: that if the government would keep its hands off and let the rich go about their heaven-sent task of growing richer, they would incidentally provide everyone else with a level of prosperity and with a wealth of opportunity that would be too surprising for words.

In 1928 I thought the Democratic voters in the back-country of America were all wrong, that they had repudiated a great man. That night in Washington I decided there was much to be said for the intuitive judgment that the sidewalks of a world-capital may breed clever men, and delightful men, but are unlikely to breed men who can be counted on through a bad time.

The election of 1928 showed there was still life in the Democratic voters of rural America, that even if they were too few to win an election they were also too proud to become the servants of the big-city machines. And then came 1929. The only defence Republicanism—the politics of big business—had ever possessed was that it worked. Nobody pretended it was pretty; nobody claimed it appealed to man's heart or soul. But it was reputed to work; it was reputed to produce prosperity. In 1929, however, it became clear to everyone that the Republican ship of state had sprung a leak. At the behest of Big Business America had dutifully abandoned all ideals save that of wealth.

Slow and reluctant was the long descent,  
With many farewell pious looks behind,  
And dumb misgivings where the path might wind;

Nevertheless, the descent was steady and inexorable. In 1928 both major parties were bidding against each other in their promises of how much money everyone

might soon expect to have. No queries as to the quality of American life were allowed to intrude, no memories of the dream which had once made Americans proud. And suddenly, after all else had been bartered for a mess of pottage, the pottage was withdrawn.

Nobody loved Mr. Hoover for his moral qualities; nobody suspected Mr. Mellon of having a heart of gold. Such people were endured because they were thought to insure prosperity. When the prosperity proved a delusion, the Republican Party suffered a defeat as spectacular as that of Mr. Smith in 1929. The Democratic Party, so recently thought to be doomed, found itself with a mandate to revive America. The great question before the party was whether to interpret that revival in purely physical terms, or whether to return to its old ideals.

With this brief sketch of the background in mind, it is interesting to consider the Republican claims in the campaign of 1936.

2

First of all, the Republican Party claims to stand for conservatism, a word which repays careful study. A conservative is a man who believes in the moral traditions of his race, and in the institutions which have grown up as expressions, or as defences, of that moral ideal. A conservative in the Western world, for example, will believe in the Church and the family. He will admit that the superficial forms and customs of society may have to bend or change as the physical forms of life are changed by mechanical inventions. But the Church and the family express the deepest moral affirmations of a conservative in the Christian world. Those institutions cannot be tampered with; they cannot be whittled away or compromised. Whatever changes may be made in order to adapt society to a shifting environment, those

changes must not threaten the Church or the family. With this allowance made, with the moral basis of society protected (together with the institutions necessary to that moral basis), the conservative can be as adaptable as anybody else. There is nothing in his creed which makes him unsympathetic to physical change, or to progress in pure or in applied science, so long as such change, such progress, is not made an excuse for abandoning the basic affirmations which really matter.

The conservative, for example, can never admit that the growth of the machine, or the appearance of the problem of technological unemployment, could justify the totalitarian state. For the conservative believes that the Church is necessary to the existence of our civilization, and if the Church is necessary it must be an autonomous Church within an autonomous State, not a Church subjected to the whims of a political tyranny. Similarly, the conservative can never admit that the needs of business, or the demands of efficiency, could be an excuse for subjecting the labouring masses to a way of life which tends to destroy the family. For the family, to the conservative, is what matters; the family is necessary; "business" and "efficiency" are relatively trivial. The essence of conservatism is precisely that conviction that there are certain basic institutions which are all-important, and that the purpose of politics is to foster those institutions, to see to it that they are not sacrificed to some imaginary "economic law."

If the Republican Party, past and present, be examined with this description of conservatism in mind, the party will be seen to have small claim to the use of this good word. The Republicans have boasted that theirs has been the party of "prosperity," of business efficiency (which they have chosen to define in terms of monopoly capitalism, of growing concentrations of power). They have never approved of interfering with this efficiency

for the sake of such a visionary project as the Christian Church. To be sure, they speak kindly of the Church, and of the family; but it has been their view from the beginning that it was the duty of these institutions to adapt themselves as best they could to the requirements of Big Business. Any suggestion that Big Business might be called upon to modify itself in the interest of these institutions has been met with an irritated mumble about "not setting back the clock."

An example of what I mean is the Republican attitude toward the mobility of labour. It has been a cherished doctrine of that party that labour, for the sake of business prosperity and progress, must be "free" to flow backwards and forwards from area to area and from industry to industry, depending on where the highest rate of profit is to be found. It has been pointed out that, although "free" is an attractive word, what it means in a country the size of America is that the labourer had better be "free" from a home, because if he had a home he would not be sufficiently mobile; that he had better be free from responsibilities; above all, that he had better be free from children. Landless and toolless, vagrant as the red Indian, such a man cannot be the head of a family, with private property, and with personal responsibilities which he is free to fulfil. It has been suggested that if business prosperity, as interpreted by the party of big business, really required such a degradation of the family, there must be something wrong with the whole direction of American life. The Republican Party has met this suggestion with contempt, and with the reiterated lie that the standard of living is higher in America than anywhere else in the world—as if that would settle the question for a conservative, even if it were true.

On the one hand, the Republicans have refused to subordinate the passing flux of economic disorder to the permanent needs of society; on the other hand, they



have used all the fine phrases of an honest conservatism every time they wanted to oppose some minor reform which at the worst would do no good, which at the best would alleviate the inhumanity of Big Business. Let somebody propose a seven-hour day in an industry where the day is now eight hours, or let an attempt be made to unionize the workers of an industry which has hitherto been unorganized—at once the Republicans begin talking about preserving America. At once the Church and the family seem to become objects of the most tender Republican care. All the best words are worn thin in an argument where they simply do not apply.

The difference between a seven-hour day and an eight-hour day has nothing to do with conservatism. Nothing is involved but a question of fact. The problem is whether the seven-hour day will work, or whether it will bankrupt the industry. That is a problem which wise men could discuss without dragging in fundamental principles. But since the Republican Party has no principles, in its hour of need it has to use the principles of other people. And that is definitely annoying to the other people. It is annoying to me, for instance, since I believe in a genuine conservatism, to have all my favourite words taken in vain by people who believe in nothing except growing rich. The Republicans have gladly sacrificed the whole basis for a sound social order; but they call themselves conservatives because they cling to a few of their fathers' worst habits. They have the impudence to suggest that our whole Christian civilization is threatened every time anybody recommends depriving them of their more flagrant rackets.

The true difference between conservatism and radicalism—which is fundamental to an understanding of the modern American tangle—can be illustrated from my experience on the lecture platform. During the past

two seasons in America I have done a great deal of debating with communists. For the most part I have found that when we define the world we aim to produce there is considerable agreement between us. We both want to see a world in which a set of moral values will predominate. The communists think my plan for producing that world is vain and impractical. It is opposed to the economic drift, and therefore it has no reality. I think the communist programme is vain because even if it worked it would produce a world the opposite of what they think they desire. But there lies the real distinction: the conservative thinks you can attain a given moral end only by encouraging and protecting the institutions which have been associated with that end throughout the history of our civilization; the radical thinks you can attain that moral end only by throwing away the institutions which have been associated with it and erecting a new set of institutions in their stead. But both groups have a moral end in view; both groups have an ideal picture of a good world which they hope to create. The trouble with the Republicans is that their only ideal is of a rich world. The ideal was expressed in Mr. Hoover's phrase—"two cars in every garage and a chicken in every pot"—the most beastly ideal that ever won the allegiance of good men.

None of my animadversions on the Republican Party are intended to suggest that the Democratic Party is necessarily superior. But the Democrats have this one advantage: the Republican Party from the beginning has been the party of the rich, who are notoriously hard to squeeze into heaven. The Democrats, whenever they have had any point at all, have been the party of rural America, of the farmer, the small tradesman, the shop-keeper, the artisan. As I have pointed out elsewhere in this book, it has been the consensus of opinion for at least two thousand years that such men are more likely

to attain a state of grace than the men who fight for great wealth or the men who inherit it. It is America's tragedy that her typical "conservative" is the sort of man who has made millions manufacturing celluloid bathing-girls to hang in the rear windows of automobiles. A country lacking genuine conservatives, a country whose traditions are not cherished, but are merely betrayed, is a country in danger of losing her soul.

The Democratic Party has at least a sound tradition to which it can return. For the first time since the Civil War it has become the majority party. Whether the excitement of that success will help it to find its soul, or merely to lose its head, is not yet certain. But at least it has a soul to find. The Republican Party has none. The Republican Party lost its soul in the calamitous days of President Grant. Since that time it has proudly behaved as if no such thing were needed.

## 3

The second claim of the Republican Party is that it stands for "sound finance." Unhappily for America, this is as great a hoax as is the claim to stand for conservatism. America, to her misfortune, has never had a party that stood for sound finance. One of the chief reasons the noble doctrines of Jefferson have been defeated in America is that they have been associated, almost from the beginning, with an ignorant easy-money finance. Obviously, a good money-policy cannot of itself make a good country; but a viciously bad money-policy can go a long way toward making a good country impossible. The choice in America has been between the cheap-money policy of the Democratic Party, which was mistakenly supposed to be in the interest of the poor, and the "sound-money" policy of the Republican Party, which was correctly supposed to be in the interest of the rich.

As all the world knows, professional economists are not a happy family. They are not noted for their agreement with one another or for their gentleness with colleagues of whom they disapprove. Nevertheless, there is a definite body of opinion which is recognized as "orthodox economics." Many of the best-known economists of to-day dissent from this opinion, yet they admit its claim to the title of orthodoxy, for it can trace its parentage through the most illustrious figures straight back to the beginnings of economic science. If the phrase "sound finance," means anything at all, it means the monetary views advocated by this school of thought.

The basic conclusion of orthodox economics in regard to money is in striking variance with American practice. The conclusion is that it is a fatal error to try to keep the price level from falling. Instead of having a managed currency which can be expanded as the nation's productivity expands (so that when there are more goods there is more money with which to exchange them), the money supply should so far as possible be kept constant. (The phrase "money supply" is, of course, used to include bank credit as well as currency.) This means that as industrial progress makes goods more abundant prices will steadily fall. The orthodox economists argue hotly that these falling prices will not have a depressing effect on trade; in fact, they insist that it is only by adopting this policy of a relatively constant supply of money that a nation can hope to avoid recurrent booms and collapses.

It does not matter to my present argument whether this orthodox view is right or wrong. The point to notice is that the Republicans, who cry aloud for "sound finance," never acted on this view when they were in power. The era of Republican Prosperity, during the 'twenties, saw a steady and enormous credit inflation, which kept prices from falling and which led directly,

according to orthodox views, to the collapse under Mr. Hoover. Professor Lionel Robbins of the London School of Economics, a high-priest of orthodoxy, comments as follows on the events leading up to 1929 :

Thus in the last analysis it was deliberate co-operation between Central bankers, deliberate "reflation" on the part of the Federal Reserve authorities, which produced the worst phase of this tremendous fluctuation. It was not old-fashioned practice, but new-fashioned theory which was responsible for the excesses of the American disaster.

There is no sign at all that the Republicans who are now talking about the "baloney dollar" intend to adopt orthodox practice when they come back to power. There is not even any sign that they understand what orthodox practice means. It is one of America's handicaps that throughout her political history she has never had a party standing for "sound finance." The Republicans, for the most part, have wanted to keep the actual currency "sound." But currency, in a modern industrial nation, is nothing but the small change of finance. Nine-tenths of the money in use is bank-credit—and the Republicans have never been shy about expanding bank-credit. The Democrats, on the other hand, when from time to time they have got into the hands of a Populist movement, have wished to inflate openly, by expanding the currency through paper money, or bimetallism, or some other device.

Anyone wishing to understand America ought to realize that just as the Republican Party's conservatism is a fake, so the Republican Party's pretence to stand for "sound finance" is thoroughly fraudulent. The Republican Party stands for credit-manipulations and the economic wizardry of high finance; the Democratic Party stands for the simple hope that if there were more currency, especially more metal currency, everybody

ought to be better off. Neither party has ever tried to educate the public on the perplexing realities of money, perhaps because neither party possesses leaders who have taken the preliminary step of educating themselves.

## 4

The third point for which the Republican Party claims to stand is the minimum of government interference with business. This is closely related to two other favourite points of the Republicans: opposition to the centralization of more and more power in Washington, and the preservation of the Constitution against alleged New Deal attempts to break it down. If these three inter-related points, with their rich historical background, are properly understood, the main realities of modern American politics will be revealed.

From the beginning of the history of the United States one of the fundamental fights has been on the question of centralizing power in Washington. The two parties have recently changed sides on this issue; and the reason for the dramatic shift is important. In earliest days it was the Federalist Party—the followers of Alexander Hamilton and the ancestors of the present Republican Party—which stood for centralization, for a loose construction of the Constitution which would allow the federal government to take unto itself powers which were not enumerated in the bond. It was the Democratic Party—the followers of Jefferson—which opposed centralization, arguing for a strict construction of the powers of the central government as specified in the document. The reason for this division was that the Hamiltonians, the party of wealth and privilege, felt that only a strong central government could set up and control the financial institutions which were necessary if America was to grow into a nation with a powerful monied oligarchy. The Jeffersonians quite agreed with this thesis, and therefore

they were opposed to centralization. The Jeffersonians felt that state governments would be more responsive than a distant federal government to the desires of the plain man. They felt that laws protecting the weak would be easier to secure in a local Legislature than in a far-away one. They felt that men who wished to promote the large financial interests would be more numerous and more influential at a national capital than at the capital of a State or county. They also felt that the mere existence of powerful state governments, with differing laws, would interfere with the growth of financial and business interests on a national scale.

Under the Fifth Amendment—adopted at the same time that the Constitution itself was ratified—the federal government was forbidden to deprive a “person” of life, liberty, or property without due process of law. The Courts interpreted the word “person” to cover corporations as well as individual men and women. The Hamiltonians felt, therefore, that the great accumulations of corporate wealth would not be endangered by the centralization of power in Washington, even if the government should get into the hands of the “wrong people,” since Washington was forbidden to deal harshly with the corporate persons. The States, however, were not so forbidden in the days before the Civil War—which was another reason why the followers of Jefferson, and later of Jackson, wished to keep as much power as possible in the hands of the States. But immediately after the Civil War the Republican Party, at the point of the bayonet, forced through the Fourteenth Amendment. It would not have been possible to secure ratification of this amendment except that the Southern States were still under military occupation. Under the pretext of securing the new rights and privileges of negroes, the Fourteenth Amendment imposed upon the States the restrictions which the Fifth Amendment had imposed on

the federal government. Henceforth no State could deprive a "person" of property without due process of law—and the precedents whereby corporations were regarded as persons were by this time of long standing.

The monopolists, whose interests had been ably forwarded by the Republican Party, now seemed to have a system which could not be broken. A legal No-Man's Land had been created, bounded on the one side by the Fifth Amendment and on the other side by the Fourteenth Amendment, in which corporations could grow into repressive monopolies without anyone having the power to control them. The result was the astonishing concentration of control over real property, the swift and deadly flowering of monopolies, which marked the first three decades of the twentieth century in America.<sup>1</sup>

By the time this process was complete, no party honestly wishing to safeguard the interests of the plain man could afford to stand for decentralization and for State control of industrial and financial relations. There had been such a concentration of economic power in New York that only an equivalent concentration of political power in Washington could hope to stand up to it. To ask a state government to control the House of Morgan would be a joke: the House of Morgan would scarcely deign to treat with anything so inconsiderable. So it is not surprising that at just this stage in the story the Republican Party begins to talk about State Rights, about the iniquity of transferring to Washington power which rightfully belongs to local authorities.

From this time on, the liberal national leaders, the men whose loyalties and hopes were analogous to those of Jefferson and Jackson, began more and more to look to Washington for laws protecting the plain man. For a

<sup>1</sup> The classic picture of this process is found in *The Modern Corporation and Private Property*, by A. A. Berle and Gardiner C. Means. New York, 1933.



long time the best protection had seemed to be to save the power of the state governments; but that game had been lost. Now the best protection was to meet loose construction with loose construction, to assume that Congress had the power (either through its control of interstate commerce or under the "general welfare clause" of the Constitution) to pass the social legislation and the anti-monopoly laws which the plain man wanted.

And at this point the Supreme Court became the last but puissant friend of monopoly, the defender of the Constitution against any humanitarian nonsense and against any infringement on the natural rights of the great corporate and anonymous "persons." New York State, for example, passed a law forbidding anyone to work in a bakery for more than ten hours a day; but the Supreme Court decided that the law was unconstitutional. This decision led Mr. Justice Holmes, in a dissenting opinion, to make the acid comment, "The Fourteenth Amendment does not enact Mr. Herbert Spencer's Social Statics." And in a similar case Mr. Justice Brandeis said in dissenting:

"There must be power in the States and the Nation to remould, through experimentation, our economic practices and institutions to meet changing social and economic needs. I cannot believe that the framers of the Fourteenth Amendment, or the States which ratified it, intended to deprive us of the power to correct the evils of technological unemployment and excess productive capacity which have attended progress in the useful arts. . . . If we would guide by the light of reason, we must let our minds be bold."

Though Mr. Justice Brandeis could not believe this, a majority of his colleagues on the Supreme Court could, and did, believe it. The majority of the Court has been in substantial agreement that if the federal government

undertakes to curb the abuses of monopoly it is violating the Fifth Amendment and infringing the rights of the States, and that if the state governments undertook to curb the same abuses they would be violating the Fourteenth Amendment. This humourless point of view is being defended by the Republican Party with all the old Jeffersonian arguments. The Republicans, in fact, have asked conservative Democrats to desert Mr. Roosevelt and the New Deal on the ground that the present administration has betrayed the Jeffersonian principles. And a number of Democrats have responded to the plea—failing, apparently, to notice that Jefferson did not defend strict construction of the Constitution as an end in itself, but merely as a weapon in his war for justice. That weapon was broken by the Civil War, or by the war-made Fourteenth Amendment. It would, of course, be very pleasant for the Republicans if they could trick their opponents into using the old broken weapon, on the ground that it is the weapon that counts, and not the war. But this is one of a number of pleasant things that does not seem likely to happen.

A similar attempt to confuse the issue is being made by the Republicans in regard to the money question. Mr. Roosevelt has several times referred to himself as a follower of Andrew Jackson, the second patron saint of the Democratic Party. The Republicans have made much fun of these statements on the grounds that Mr. Roosevelt has increased the public debt, whereas Jackson set himself successfully to wipe the debt out altogether. Here again the use of a particular weapon is regarded as the whole purpose of the war.

The Hamiltonians had announced to America that "a national debt is a national blessing," and Hamilton himself had used that debt as the chief means of creating his much-loved money-power. So Jefferson, and Jackson after him, sought to abolish the debt, knowing that by

doing so they were helping to decentralize financial power. For them the abolition of the debt, like the strict construction of the Constitution, was a way of protecting the plain man. But if Mr. Roosevelt had taken the same course in 1933, he would have had to abolish about a fifth of the plain men as well, through starvation. His opponents might have flattered him and called him a consistent Democrat, but his friends would have called him something less endearing.

It is still true (and there is no reason to think Mr. Roosevelt would deny it) that in the long run the Jeffersonian end will best be secured by a government as decentralized as possible. But before the government can be decentralized, it has got to attend to the decentralization of the great corporate "persons"; before the debt can be abolished, America will have to build an economy in which the plain man, if he is industrious, can see to his own security. This is the present phase of the Jacksonian war. It could not be carried on by a man who, losing sight of the Jacksonian ends, was content to wave the broken Jacksonian weapons.

A Washington dispatch printed by the *New York Times* is a pleasing satire on the big business demand that the President, in seeking to control monopolies, should take a narrow Jeffersonian view of the Federal powers. The headline was "Gangsters Invoke the Constitution." The dispatch read:

Gangsters, seeking to evade the new national crime laws and the power these statutes give to Federal prosecutors, are attacking the constitutionality of the Kidnapping and Firearms Registration Acts. . . .

The kidnapping and stolen property laws rest upon the power of the Government to regulate interstate commerce. They are like the N.R.A.<sup>1</sup> in that respect. The Firearms Registration Law, like the A.A.A., is based upon the Federal taxing

<sup>1</sup> Declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.

power. Laws against killing Federal agents and escaping from Federal custody rely upon the general powers of the government.

If the gangsters were better read, they would doubtless be gravely rebuking the President for calling himself a follower of Jefferson or Jackson, and asking him how he can expect private enterprise to flourish in America when the federal government sticks its nose into every man's business.

## 5

The legal status of the United States Supreme Court, the reasons for the long wrangle among American leaders as to the power which the Constitution intended to give the Court, form a sideline in American history which must be explored by anyone wishing to understand the political confusion of to-day.

The ancient battle over the Supreme Court has been renewed by the recent decision outlawing the A.A.A., the Act embodying the Administration's short-term agricultural policy.<sup>1</sup> The A.A.A. provided for paying benefits to farmers who would curtail certain crops, notably cotton and corn-hogs. The payments were made out of money raised by a processing tax, which became known as "the farmer's tariff." The Supreme Court decided, by a majority of six to three, that the Act infringed the rights of the States, agriculture being described as a local affair.

There are two unusual features of this case. In the first place, the economic benefits and hardships which follow from the decision affect the nation sectionally. Throughout most of the East, where the processing taxes were a burden, the decision was greeted with joy. Throughout most of the Mississippi Valley, where lived

<sup>1</sup> The long-term policy involves a real shift in the basis of American agricultural life, as I shall explain below.

the farmers who received benefits, it was greeted with sorrow, and sometimes with bitterness. And, in the second place, the dissenting opinion (put forward by Justices Stone, Brandeis and Cardozo) not only challenged the majority opinion with unusual acidity, but raised the momentous question of the usurpation of authority by the judiciary, even going so far as to relate this question to the problem of the preservation of the American Government.

"That the Government's power of the purse is a great one," said Justice Stone, "is not now for the first time announced. . . . The suggestion that it must now be curtailed by judicial fiat because it may be abused by unwise use hardly rises to the level of argument. So may judicial power be abused."

These are strong words. If spoken by a citizen who did not happen to be a Justice of the Supreme Court, the more inflammable Republicans would have been likely to charge treason. But Justice Stone concluded with an even more ominous passage.

"A tortured construction of the Constitution," he said, "is not to be justified by recourse to extreme examples of reckless Congressional spending which might occur if courts could not prevent expenditures which, even if they could be thought to effect any national purpose, would be possible only by action of a Legislature lost to all sense of public responsibility. Such suppositions must leave unmoved any but the mind accustomed to believe that it is the business of courts to sit in judgment on the wisdom of legislative action. Courts are not the only agency of Government that must be assumed to have capacity to govern. . . . Interpretation of our great charter of Government which proceeds on any assumption that the responsibility for the preservation of our institutions is the exclusive concern of any one of the three branches of Government, or that it alone can save

them from destruction, is far more likely, in the long run, 'to obliterate the constituent members' of 'an indestructible Union of indestructible States' than the frank recognition that language, even of a Constitution, may mean what it says: That the power to tax and spend includes the power to relieve a Nation-wide economic maladjustment by conditional gifts of money."

As a result of this dissenting opinion, and of the state of mind throughout the agricultural districts, the A.A.A. decision has led to widespread discussion of the relation between the Supreme Court and the Legislature. To understand the importance of this argument it is necessary to review some of the previous discussions of the same point.

Of late the Republicans have been so unwise as to take the stand that there is something heretical, something disloyal, in the view that the Supreme Court should not in theory (and does not according to the language of the Constitution) possess the power to nullify acts of the Legislature. This is a dangerous stand to take, for many of America's greatest men have held that the Supreme Court has usurped power which it was never intended to possess.

Only a few months before he died, Theodore Roosevelt declared that when the Supreme Court nullified an act of Congress there should be a referendum giving the people power to nullify the Court's decision or to approve it. In this feeling that the Court should not be the final resource, the last great Republican President was in agreement with the first. At the time of the Dred Scott decision, in 1857,<sup>1</sup> Lincoln announced that the Republicans would reject the Court's opinion respecting the

<sup>1</sup> In this decision the Supreme Court laid down the dictum that the federal government had no authority to interfere with slavery in the territories. Had this been accepted as the last word, the Republican Party—formed to prevent the spread of slavery in the territories—would have been an impossibility.

power of Congress over the institution of slavery. And it was well for the Republicans that they did reject this opinion. For the cardinal doctrine of the new party was that Congress should establish freedom in the territories. Had the Dred Scott decision been accepted, the Republican Party would have ceased.

"Familiarize yourselves with the chains of bondage," said Lincoln, "and you prepare your own limbs to wear them. . . . And let me tell you that all these things are prepared for you by the teachings of history if the elections shall promise that the next Dred Scott decision and all future decisions will be quietly acquiesced in by the people." Such incitations to disrespect for the Supreme Court would not be approved, to-day, by the Liberty League.

President Jackson,<sup>1</sup> in his war on the Bank, steadily refused to admit that the Court spoke with binding authority when it declared the Bank constitutional. In vetoing the Bill to renew the Bank's charter, he said that the Court "ought not to control the co-ordinate authorities of this Government. The Congress, the Executive and the Court must each for itself be guided by its own opinion of the Constitution." In saying this, Jackson merely repeated the opinion of the great Jefferson, which was that each branch of the Government is charged with construing the Constitution in so far as it bears on the functions of that branch.

Here are four of America's most important Presidents—two Republicans and two Democrats—agreeing that the Supreme Court should not be accepted by the other branches of the Government as the final arbiter of what is constitutional. The situation is absurd, since the only justification for a written Constitution is that it will at least determine such major matters with a clarity which will be expedient even if it lacks subtlety. How has it

<sup>1</sup> Elected in 1828, and again in 1832.

been possible for informed men to hold divergent views on the constitutional powers of the Supreme Court?

As is well known, there is no section or article in the Constitution conferring upon the Supreme Court the power of setting aside acts of Congress as unconstitutional, and hence void. This is one of the "inferred powers" which have played so large a part in American constitutional history. Nevertheless, the arguments with which the inference is supported are very strong. I quote some of these arguments from John Marshall's decision in the case of *Marbury vs. Madison* (1803):<sup>1</sup>

"The question whether an act, repugnant to the Constitution, can become the law of the land, is a question deeply interesting to the United States. . . .

"It is emphatically the province and duty of the judicial department to say what the law is. Those who apply the rule to particular cases must of necessity expound and interpret that rule. If two laws conflict with each other, the courts must decide on the operation of each.

"So if a law is in opposition to the Constitution; if both the law and the Constitution apply to a particular case, so that the court must either decide that case conformably to the law, disregarding the Constitution; or conformably to the Constitution, disregarding the law; the court must determine which of these conflicting rules governs the case. . . .

"If, then, the courts are to regard the Constitution, and the Constitution is superior to any ordinary act of the Legislature, the Constitution, and not such ordinary act, must govern the case to which they both apply. . . .

"Thus, the particular phraseology of the Constitution of the United States confirms and strengthens the

<sup>1</sup> Marshall at the time was Chief Justice. The decision is a famous one in American law, because this was the first time the Supreme Court claimed the power to nullify acts of Congress.



principle, supposed to be essential to all written constitutions, that a law repugnant to the Constitution is void; and that courts, as well as other departments, are bound by that instrument."

Following on this argument, the Court declared that an act, conferring on the Supreme Court authority to issue writs of mandamus to public officers, was opposed to the Constitution and hence inoperative.

Marshall was here arguing, in effect, that it is not possible to have a written constitution without providing for judicial review of legislation. He was not arguing, of course, that such review must take place as soon as a law is passed, but only that it must take place when a case, arising under that law, is brought before the Court. In the words of a modern constitutional lawyer,<sup>1</sup> Marshall's claim rests on the assumption that the court is "under a duty to protect litigants from the enforcement of unconstitutional statutes which are involved in controversies that come before it." If such a duty is not admitted, Marshall suggests, there is no distinction between the Constitution and the ordinary acts of the Legislature. And if there is no such distinction, there is in reality no such thing as a written Constitution.

The argument is effective. Yet Jefferson rejects the argument in whole. And there have been many students and politicians to agree with Jefferson during the past 130 years.<sup>2</sup> What is the Jeffersonian case?

1. Jefferson admitted—in fact, insisted—that laws

<sup>1</sup> Ambrose Duskow, *Historic Opinions of the United States Supreme Court*, New York, 1935, p. xii.

<sup>2</sup> It is, in fact, the conclusion of Mr. Charles A. Beard, who is probably the leading American authority on the making of the Constitution, that the weight of evidence is with those who assert that the framers of the Constitution had no intention of conferring such powers on the Supreme Court. Cp. *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States*, New York, 1923; and *Economic Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy*, New York, 1915.

repugnant to the Constitution are void. He broke with Marshall on the question of whether it was the business of the Supreme Court to impose upon the other branches of the Government its own decisions as to the constitutionality of a law. According to Jefferson, it was the duty of Congress to decide on its own authority whether a law was constitutional. If a majority thought not, the Bill must not be passed. But if a Bill was once passed, it then became the duty of the President to decide whether it was constitutional. If he thought not, he must refuse to sign it. But once a Bill has been signed by the President, and has become a law, it is the duty of the Supreme Court *to interpret that law, to the best of its ability, with regard to the cases coming before the Court.* It is not, according to Jefferson, the privilege of the Supreme Court to simplify its problem by saying that a given law does not exist.

2. Jefferson insisted that this was the only way of maintaining the "separation of powers" which is supposed to be a feature of the American Government. The "separation of powers" is taken to mean that the Legislature should legislate, that the Executive should execute the laws, and that the judicial department should settle controversies arising under the laws. If the judicial department had the power to undo the work of the Legislature and the intention of the Executive, the "separation of powers" would, according to Jefferson, break down.

3. Jefferson claimed that the Fathers were on his side, that the intention of the framers of the Constitution had been to withhold this dominant power from the Supreme Court. This argument was summarized by Senator Breckenridge of Kentucky, during Jefferson's Administration: "I did not expect, sir, to find the doctrine of the power of the courts to annul Acts of Congress, as unconstitutional, so seriously insisted on. . . . I would ask

where they got that power, and who checks the courts when they violate the Constitution? . . . Is it not extraordinary, that if this high power was intended, it should nowhere appear?"

4. Lastly, Jefferson feared the conversion of a written Constitution into an unwritten document so that the Court could enlarge, by construction, its own powers. Jefferson was especially averse to giving any extra power to John Marshall, who, as Chief Justice throughout a generation of time, was largely instrumental in determining the development of American constitutional development. "The judge's inveteracy is profound," wrote Jefferson of Marshall in 1810, "and his mind of that gloomy malignity which will never let him forego the opportunity of satiating it on a victim."

Here, then, are the leading arguments on the two sides of that long debate over the power of the American Supreme Court. Neither argument, I think, is conclusive. The Constitution itself is silent on the subject; it is a question of inference, and leading American statesmen have differed in regard to the inference for the past hundred and thirty-three years—ever since the decision in the case of *Marbury vs. Madison*. What we clearly have, therefore, is a question which can honestly be decided in either of two ways. We shall never understand why men of intellectual power have come to different conclusions on this question if we seek the answer in terms of pure logic. We must seek it in terms of the political opinions and prejudices of the men themselves. That the question is not dead, that it would be unwise to view it as something that has been decided once and for all is suggested by a Washington dispatch in the American papers of January 11th, 1936. The dispatch reads:

A drive to curtail the powers of the Supreme Court without resorting to a constitutional amendment was planned to-day in a meeting of a small bloc of House members.

Representative Cross, Democrat, Texas, emerged from the conference with word to the reporters that he was "sure" he could obtain a hearing "in the next week or two" by the House Judiciary Committee on his Bill to forbid an inferior court to pass upon the constitutionality of an act of Congress<sup>1</sup> and to bar the Supreme Court from ruling on constitutionality in any case coming to it on appeal.

One Democratic chieftain said the party leadership was canvassing the possibilities of such a proposal. Although preferring not to be quoted by name, he said he was convinced personally that Congress had the power under the Constitution to pass such legislation.

Representative Lewis, Democrat, Maryland, who called the meeting, said the bill "appeals very strongly to those who think the republic needs a legislative organ as much as a judicial organ, and if one is to be permitted to destroy the other, the purpose of the Constitution is being defeated and its terms violated."

Here are the old Jeffersonian arguments, put forward with as much conviction as in 1803. When it is said that Congress has power under the Constitution "to bar the Supreme Court from ruling on constitutionality in any case coming to it on appeal," the reference is to Article III, Section 2 of the Constitution, which reads (in part):

In all cases affecting ambassadors, other public ministers, and consuls, and those in which a State shall be party, the Supreme Court shall have original jurisdiction. In all other cases before mentioned the Supreme Court shall have appellate jurisdiction, both as to the law and fact, with such exceptions and under such regulations as the Congress shall make. . . .

It seems a plausible contention that under this section of the Constitution Congress has the power to make "exceptions and regulations" forbidding the Supreme Court, in cases coming to it on appeal, to throw out laws

<sup>1</sup> The lower Federal Courts are also in the habit of declaring acts of Congress unconstitutional, although no such declaration is finally binding until the Supreme Court has agreed.

which have been passed by the Congress. But it is only cases coming to the Supreme Court on appeal that are important in this connection. If the Congress is free to determine the conditions under which the Supreme Court shall exercise its appellate jurisdiction, then the Congress may at any moment withdraw the Supreme Court's power to declare laws null and void. The chief reason why Congress, though often threatening, has never actually moved against the Supreme Court, is that there exists a widespread feeling in America that the Supreme Court is a blessing. The feeling is especially strong among the propertied classes, who have a great deal to say about the formation of public opinion.

Professor Frank Owsley of Vanderbilt University has recently called attention to the fact that almost the only point on which the Supreme Court has been consistent throughout its history has been in the defence of property against the various attempts made by State and national governments to enlarge the field of justice. Of late years this defence of property has tended to become a defence of very large property. It is natural, therefore, that any attack on the power of the Supreme Court should result in a scream of rage from the people who are primarily interested in very large property. When, as a result of the A.A.A. decision, Democratic members of Congress made proposals such as those which I quoted above, the Republican press discussed the proposals as if they were out-and-out treason, and the Republican Party began to recommend itself to the country as the sole defender of the Constitution against the nameless injuries which the New Deal planned to inflict upon that document. And the Democrats replied that the Constitution had been twisted in the interests of Big Business and that they merely sought to restore the document's original perfection.

Jeffersonians and Hamiltonians were arguing in these

same angry and empty terms a hundred and thirty years ago. The argument can never be settled by the application of pure logic to the text of the Constitution. It seems clear that in the end Americans will have to recognize the two theories of government which lie behind the two opinions as to the power of the Supreme Court, and will have to make an official and binding decision as to which theory they wish to follow.

Those who take the Jeffersonian view are those who believe in thorough-going democracy, those who wish the people to exercise complete and immediate control over their government. This is suggested by the very names of the four most famous Presidents who, as I have pointed out, took the stand that the decisions of the Supreme Court as to the constitutionality of a law should not be regarded as binding upon the Congress and the Executive. These four Presidents were Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt.

Those who take the view of John Marshall are those who believe that the popular mind is too mercurial, the popular passions too unstable, to be entrusted with the great and final decisions. The beauty of a written constitution, according to this view, is that basic political and economic forms cannot easily be altered by the people. As John Marshall put it: "The exercise of this original right (to decide the bases of the Government) is a very great exertion; nor can it, nor ought it, to be frequently repeated."

The followers of Marshall argue that society would be in a turmoil if there were no organic law which could not be overthrown by the two-thirds majority in the Legislature which is needed to override the Presidential veto. The followers of Jefferson point out that the British Parliament can pass such laws as it chooses, subject to no judicial veto, and that Great Britain is not notable for turmoil and disorder. Many Americans, in fact, blame

a large part of the flightiness and triviality of Congress upon the fact that it has not the final responsibility which rests upon Parliament.

The truth about these two groups in America is that neither can prove that its view is clearly the view which is embodied in the Constitution. The Constitution is vague (many historians think it is purposely vague) on this point. Yet the issue is too important to be left in the air. The American people should make up their minds which kind of government they want to have: whether they wish the Congress and the President—allegedly under popular control—to have final authority, or whether they wish such authority to rest with a Supreme Court, appointed for life, whose members necessarily come from a limited and privileged class. Once the public decides between these two theories of the Constitution, the question can be settled by an amendment declaring that the powers of the Supreme Court are exactly thus and so. The present uncertainty is a nuisance.

The issues involved in this question of the Supreme Court are not just minor party quarrels. This is made clear by one of the far-reaching implications of the A.A.A. decision—an implication which the public did not notice because the public was too busy arguing over whether the Supreme Court had a right to do what it did.

According to the A.A.A. decision, the problem of agriculture and its control is a local question. A majority of the nine members of the Supreme Court have decided that such is the meaning of the Constitution. Unfortunately for the United States, this decision contradicts a previous decision of Fate. The climate and terrain of North America are such that agriculture cannot long be carried out, on a scale to support the present population, if it be regarded solely as a local problem.

In Washington recently I was talking to an Englishman who has lived in America off and on for many years. He asked me if I had ever considered the question of whether America was a permanent country, of whether there was reason to expect America to survive as a centre of civilization, of whether in another century or two the country might not be just another example of and ruined by the fecklessness and avarice of men. I answered that not only had I considered it, but that it was one of the chief problems which the present Administration was trying to face. I told him if he wanted to be useful he had better ask the same question of the Justices of the Supreme Court. I told him he ought to take a few photographs along with him when he called on the Justices—for example, photographs of dead land in China where a high civilization once flourished, of dead land in Mesopotamia where the world's wealth and culture once centred, of dead land in the South and West of the United States where the Americans have ruined a rich heritage with record speed.<sup>1</sup> I said that after showing these pictures he might ask the Justices whether they were still quite sure that regulation of agriculture was a local affair.

It is these simple and sinister facts about the American land which Senator Norris had in mind when he proclaimed that the A.A.A. decision "cannot stand if our country is to endure." Already about 100,000,000 acres of the best American farm lands have been destroyed. This is an area equal to Illinois (which is itself about the size of England), Ohio, Maryland and North Carolina. And when I say "destroyed," I do not mean that these lands need a little fertilization or a few years of rest; I mean that it would take centuries of Nature's efforts

<sup>1</sup> Some of the most striking facts in this connection are collected in the pamphlet, *Little Waters: A Study of Headwater Streams . . . , Their Use and Relations to the Land*, published by the Soil Conservation Service, Washington, 1935.



to restore them, that they are already too far gone to be helped by any efforts on the part of man. Another 125,000,000 acres are seriously impaired. And still another 100,000,000 acres are threatened. Under present methods all these acres will be gone in less than a century—the equivalent of twelve States of the richest land in the world.

No wonder that an Englishman asks incredulously if America has ever faced the question whether she is “a permanent country.”

There are three basic facts underlying the American land problem. The first is the obvious fact that agriculture, which seems the most natural of man’s occupations, is nevertheless unnatural in the sense that it is an interruption of Nature, that it is bound to upset the delicate balance which Nature has established during geologic ages. A major problem of agriculture, indeed of civilization, is how to secure the benefits of this unnatural process while doing the least possible damage to the arrangements of Nature.

The second fact is that for the most part the American use of the land has been what Europeans contemptuously call “robber agriculture.” Instead of doing the least possible damage to the arrangements of Nature, Americans have tended during some three centuries to do the most possible damage—and now they approach the day of retribution.

The third fact is that America is not a country like England, where climate and geography make it hard to ruin the land permanently. An English farmer can destroy the virtue of his soil; but that virtue can be restored. A feckless American farmer, on the other hand, can destroy the soil itself—not the virtue of the soil, but the actual physical existence of the soil: it washes down into the great, sluggish, coffee-coloured American rivers; it blows away in dust-storms over the Atlantic

ocean. And once the top-soil is gone, man can do nothing to restore it. Nature can restore it; but Nature takes too long. In respect to the impermanence of her precious top-soil America resembles those nations of the Mediterranean world and of Asia where history has shown all too explicitly how easy it is to destroy the basis for a high life.

If these three facts are kept in mind, it will be seen that the question whether America is "permanent" is related to the question whether America can adopt a national policy for preserving her land. The change of heart which is needed before Americans will consent to abandon "robber agriculture" may, of course, be regarded as a local problem. Such a change may perhaps be fostered by community effort more efficiently than by federal effort. But granted the change of heart, there is still need for concerted national activity. The concentration of finance, and hence of control over natural resources, is a fact. It cannot be combated except by an equivalent concentration of political power. No change of heart on the part of the American farmer will affect the absentee owners of the great timber companies which have wasted whole countrysides by denuding them suddenly of timber, leaving the top-soil to start the long journey down the Mississippi river-system to the Gulf of Mexico. And even after this problem has been brought under control, there remains the problem of flood control—a problem which is largely the result of past sins against the American land, but which cannot now be solved by local effort. Here, as always in America, the ultimate aim is the maximum of decentralization, of regional autonomy. But for the time being the man who cries out against control by the federal government is crying out against any effective political control whatsoever. He is indirectly defending control by finance, which is interested only in a rapid cash return

during the next few years and which does not care in the least whether America is a permanent country.

At a recent press conference Mr. Roosevelt said that one of the major objectives of his Administration is "to so manage physical use of the land in the United States that we will not only maintain soil fertility, but will hand on to the next generation a country with better productive power and a greater permanency of land use than the one we inherited from previous generations." Time presses. A recent report by the Soil Conservation Service says: "If something effective is not done within a generation it will be too late, for this earth-disease, like some human diseases, can never be cured if neglected during the early stages."

It is none too soon that America has a President and a Secretary of Agriculture capable of rising to this vision. But the Supreme Court says it is much too soon, that America must first change her Constitution. The Supreme Court says that agriculture in America is a local affair. And the great men of the Republican Party cry out that the Supreme Court has saved the country. Saved it from what? They imply that among other things the Court has saved the country from extravagance. What a nice economy it will be if America reduces her deficit by a few hundred million dollars and meanwhile loses her land! What a triumph for order, for due process, and for the doctrine of the Separation of Powers! "If the land perish, how shall man survive?"

6

The fourth important claim of the Republican Party, in the campaign of 1936, is that it stands for economy. When asked where they propose to economize, the Republicans answer that the most important place to save money, at the moment, is in the administration of Relief. This is unquestionably a popular point. It would be

still more popular if the Republicans could see their way to being more specific. An illustration of their difficulty in being specific on this point is the recent speech by Governor Alf Landon of Kansas—a leading Republican candidate for the Presidential nomination.<sup>1</sup>

At present the average relief to a family is about \$26 a month. The average work-relief is about \$47 a month. The average cost of administration is under 5 per cent., according to Mr. Harry Hopkins, the man who is in charge of relief administration. It would seem to be a fair statement that no man is being helpfully specific when he says he will economize on relief unless he is prepared to show that he could reduce the costs of administration (or to show that Mr. Hopkins is wrong when he says the present costs are below 5 per cent.), or that he could teach families how to live on less than \$26 a month, or that he could justify a wage of less than \$47 a month. Yet there has been a marked tendency among Republican orators to confine themselves to talking about economy rather than about where they would economize.

Governor Landon of Kansas (an honest and amiable man who is being built up by publicity into the horrid figure of a Western Coolidge) goes a step further than anyone else in ignoring the problem of where he would economize. He not only ignores it; he boasts of ignoring it—and this in spite of the fact that his first (and still his foremost) claim to public attention is his record as the “economy Governor” of Kansas.

In a speech made last January, in which he began his campaign for the Republican Presidential nomination, Governor Landon made the following noteworthy statement:

“When the record of the Administration is challenged their only answer is, ‘What would you do?’ That begs the question. Their programme is not only ineffective,

<sup>1</sup> I write these words in April, 1936.

it is destructive of the American system. In the face of that fact, no reasonable citizen should ask us what to do. The American people propose to solve their problems under the American system."

"No reasonable citizen should ask us what to do." That is an interesting motto for the Republican Party. The duty of an Opposition, according to this motto, is to call names and make faces; above all else, the duty of an Opposition is to refrain from thought. Side by side with Governor Landon's motto, let us put some of the brightest passages from his speech:

"The hope," he says, "that we will deal with our unemployment problem successfully lies in the fact that the hardships and suffering of the depression have made us conscious of certain defects in our society brought about by the rapid growth in our industrial structure. . . .

"Solving this problem of unemployment and old-age pensions is both humane and economic, and we shall solve it in spite of past neglect and recent well-intended but utterly unworkable, hastily thrown together, make-shift legislation."

It is good to know that the solution of America's most grievous problem will be "both humane and economic"; it is good to know that "we shall solve it in spite of past neglect"; it might be even better to know how the solving is to be done. But that begs the question, that contradicts the Landon motto: "no reasonable citizen should ask us what to do."

Let us turn to Governor Landon on economy. "Despite promises of a 25 per cent. reduction in Federal expenditures," he says, "Federal expenditures continue steadily to rise. It is true economic conditions have improved, as they do after every depression. That has been reflected in great increases in Federal income. They have not, however, been able to match the increases in Federal spending, thus repudiating the assurances of

the budget messages of three and two years ago. The gap between income and outgo steadily widens. . . .

"It has been said that the demands for relief have imperiled our Federal finances. That is only a half-truth. The money actually reaching the unemployed and impoverished has not rocked the Treasury. The rocking has been done by abysmal waste through changes of policy, maladministration and ruthless partisanship. . . . We need desperately a cheaper, simpler and more responsible relief administration throughout the union."

Here is the perfect point at which to face Mr. Harry Hopkins' challenge, made in a recent press conference. Mr. Hopkins asked any Republican orator who planned to talk about economy to take the figures of Relief expenditure and to point out where it was possible to economize. But Governor Landon, supported by his soothing motto, does not face this challenge. Having said that America needs a simpler and more responsible Relief Administration, it would seem to be his task to show how he could run Relief with less than 5 per cent. administration costs—or else to break down the statement that those are the costs at present. If America needs a cheaper Relief Administration, it is Governor Landon's job to show at whose expense he plans to make the relief cheaper. Are the twenty-six-dollar-a-month people to be cut down to twenty? They might have some trouble staying alive. Are the forty-seven-dollars-a-month wages to be reduced? If so, why? According to what principle of equity or morals?

Governor Landon answers none of these questions. He insists that America must save money. He suggests that it would be easy to save money if America had a Republican Administration. But he never shows where, or how, the money is to be saved. He retreats behind one of the silliest sentences ever spoken by man: "No reasonable citizen should ask us what to do." The importance of

this motto lies in the fact that Governor Landon, two months before the nominating convention meets, is not only the leading candidate for the Republican nomination, but that he is the candidate whose chief claim to fame lies in his being an expert on economies. It is a pity when the expert has nothing to say except that he does not approve of people who ask questions.

## 7

I have tried to suggest throughout the present chapter that the Republican Party in America is bankrupt of ideas and of principles. Its conservatism is a fraud; its sound finance is a racket; its talk of saving the Constitution and opposing centralized power is an obvious dodge to prevent politics from growing strong enough to control finance; its "economy" comes down to the statement that the Democrats are spending a great deal too much money, but that no reasonable citizen would expect a politician to point out where this waste is taking place.

The breakdown of the Republican Party cannot be explained on the comforting theory that Republicans are bad men. The breakdown symbolizes the failure of the modern American way of life—of monopoly capitalism, of the belief that all's right with the world so long as more goods are being produced each decade, of the quaint idea that if a man has two cars in his garage (and can continue making his time-payments on both of them) he will be happy even though his soul rots. The Republican Party had accepted these beliefs and had grown great on the strength of them; when the beliefs broke down the party found itself too weak in mind and morals to go back to the basic principles of American life and to renew itself from that sound tradition.

As a substitute for ideas and for principles, the Republicans have been driven to more and more frantic forms of abuse. The result has been such a loss of dignity and

authority that it is often hard to distinguish between a speech by a reputable Republican leader and an editorial in one of Mr. Hearst's newspapers. Both say the same things, and in very much the same tone of voice. This is a pity; for in American public life Mr. Hearst's friendship is the kiss of death; Mr. Hearst's enmity drops like the gentle rain from heaven and is sufficient to revive the most withered reputation.

The following is an example of the parallel between Mr. Hearst's position and the position into which the Republicans have drifted. On March 17th the leading editorial in Mr. Hearst's *Washington Herald* was headed "Tugwellism<sup>1</sup>—and Communism."

There is no difference [says the *Herald*] which the American people can discern between Stalin's spokesman—Browder<sup>2</sup>—and President Roosevelt's spokesman—Tugwell.

Comparing Tugwell's Los Angeles speech with Browder's recent appeal for Communism over the Columbia broadcasting network—Tugwell's speech was clearly the more violent.

Both spoke for class conflict.

Both advocated a hostile Farmer-Labour movement against their fellow Americans.

This, of course, is juvenile nonsense. A Farmer-Labour movement has about as much to do with communism as it has with the Treaty of Versailles. When Jefferson was elected President in 1800 he was elected by a Farmer-Labour movement: the Southern agrarian vote plus the vote of the New York City Democratic machine. Jacksonian Democracy, which ran the country for a generation before the Civil War, was a Farmer-Labour party, and has been so named by many historians. Mr. Hearst and his editorial writers are mistaken if

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Rexford Guy Tugwell is head of the Resettlement Administration, under the Department of Agriculture, and is one of Mr. Roosevelt's occasional advisers.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Earl Browder, head of the Communist Party in America.



they think they can take that fine name, rich in American tradition, and associate it in the public mind with communism.

The truth is [says the *Herald*] that communism is not coming! It is here.

We have, in all essentials, a Communistic Administration at Washington. . . .

We have a Communistic Congress. . . .

We have practically confiscation of private property through taxation—aimed, for the moment, at business, but destined, as soon as the election is over, to engulf the man of slender means and even the poor, in a confiscation of their earnings and meagre savings.

We have communism in everything but the name.

Now, these ideas, mad as they are, do not represent Mr. Hearst alone. A number of relatively sensible people believe in them. The silliest part of that editorial, for example—the charge that Mr. Tugwell is more dangerous to American institutions than are the communists—is taken from a speech by Mr. Hamilton Fish, Jr.<sup>1</sup> People like Mr. Fish should be careful. There is a precedent in American history which shows what happens to an Opposition which loses all reason and descends to unimaginative abuse. In the early days of the Republic, the Federalist Party (the Party of Hamilton, and the forebear of the present Republican Party) was destroyed, and its leaders finally driven out of public life, because the Federalists persisted in viewing the Jeffersonians the way many Republicans view the followers of the New Deal. America had to go ten years without an Opposition, before another party could form to carry on the sensible aspects of Federalism. The parallel is close enough to give the Republicans thought.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Fish, a wealthy New Yorker, is also candidate for the Republican Presidential nomination. He is more likely, however, to receive the vice-Presidential nomination, if any.

The following quotation, from a speech by Theodore Dwight at New Haven in 1801, is a match to the editorial in the *Washington Herald*:

"We have now," said Dwight, "reached the consummation of Democratic blessedness. We have a country governed by blockheads and knaves; the ties of marriage with all its felicities are severed and destroyed; our wives and daughters are thrown into the stews; our children are cast into the world from the breast and forgotten; filial piety is extinguished, and our surnames, the only mark of distinction among families, are abolished. Can the imagination paint anything more dreadful on this side hell?"

This is a remarkable description of Mr. Jefferson's Administration. It will be noticed that Dwight, like Hearst, has the faculty of picturing what he is afraid may happen as if it had already come to pass. "Our wives and daughters are thrown into the stews," says Dwight. "Communism is not coming! It is here," says Hearst.

It is exactly this implacable and half-witted hatred, illustrated in the quotation from Dwight, which drove the Federalist Party into oblivion. Several of the greatest men in American history had belonged to that party, and it had an honourable record. But when Jefferson with his Farmer-Labour group came to power, promising to run the country in the interest of the plain man, the Federalists were so angry that they lost their wits and in the end removed themselves from public life. One of the recurring miracles of history is the persistence with which rich men fly into the most inexpedient rages at the suggestion that society might benefit if they were slightly less rich.

It was not only humourless to accuse Jefferson of hurling the wives and daughters of America into the stews, it was astonishingly bad politics. Yet many Republicans seem bent on repeating that mistake.

History gives them two warnings. The first is that if you treat an honest man and his intended reforms the way the Federalists treated Mr. Jefferson, you destroy yourself and not your enemy. The second is that if you put yourself in the position of being quoted with approval by Mr. Hearst you are probably on the road to limbo.

Unless the Republican Party can start anew, with some principles that appeal to the human heart and soul, it is in danger of following its Federalist ancestor to the grave.

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

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### I

WHAT of the Democratic Party? In the spring of 1933, when the Democratic Party came to power, the nation was in trouble economically. But far more important than that, the nation was in trouble morally and spiritually. The philosophy on which the nation had tried to run its life had proved a fraud. It provided no solace for the mind, no strength and direction for the soul; and it had even ceased to provide money for the bank account. Materialism is a nasty philosophy at best; it becomes a ludicrous philosophy when it goes bankrupt.

When the economic system is on the rocks, and when at the same time the moral philosophy on which the social system is built is wholly inadequate, those who try to build a better world should make a picture, in human terms, of what they want that world to be. This picture is more important than any Reform Bill. If a reformation is to endure, it must be based on sound political and economic theory; but if a reformation is even to begin, it must be based on an ideal that can stir the human heart.

No country can be reformed by the people who hate it—a fact which left-wing intellectuals tend to miss. The haters can supply useful criticism; they can show the lies and injustices which corrode society. They can even persuade men to overthrow a world which has grown sick with injustice. But only those who remember the national ideal (which must have existed in the past, or

there would be no nation), only those who can state that ideal in moral terms and in terms of affection, can persuade a people to reform.

The first question before the Democratic Party in 1933 was whether it would attempt this moral reform, or whether it would be content merely to bring back "prosperity." Prosperity of a sort—something, at least, which the newspapers would welcome under that name—was likely to come back sooner or later under any party. But the country was ready for something better than prosperity. The country was angry and resentful at its own loss of moral aim, angry at the plain appalling difference between the phrases of the American dream and the facts of the American reality.

America——

wrote Paul Engel, the young poet from Iowa,

I hate you so because I love you so.

That was the mood of many millions throughout the country. Would the Democratic Administration take advantage of what was possibly the last chance to revive historic America?

The Administration tried to take advantage of its chance. This is the key to the last three years of American history—this, and the fact that the Administration was unprepared for such an effort. Only during the two or three months before the inauguration of President Roosevelt did the public temper give sign of an aroused moral energy, give sign that an effort at true reform was possible. A group of men, therefore, who were about to come to power equipped only with some plans for economic and political improvements, found themselves called on to attempt improvements of a more daring nature. It is no wonder that there have been inconsistencies in the New Deal.

In part the work of the New Deal has been mere

depression-fighting; in part it has been settlement work, a worthy but not very important expression of American humanitarianism; in part it has been an attempt to rebuild America on the basis of her old ideals, her old vision of greatness. Out of respect for "practical politics," the third part has often been subordinated to the other two. Yet the true leaders of the New Deal (Mr. Roosevelt; Mr. Henry Wallace of the Department of Agriculture; Mr. Harold Ickes of the Department of the Interior; Mr. Cordell Hull of the Department of State) have always regarded the third part as by far the most important. It is for this reason that the Administration has not lost its hold upon the people,<sup>1</sup> in spite of mistakes, in spite of occasional uncertainty and amateurishness, in spite of public expenditure on a scale which has frightened many of its friends.

A recent editorial in the *Indianapolis Times* gives, I think, an accurate picture of the average American's view of the first three years of the New Deal.

Business is better [says the *Times*]; the index has advanced from 60 to 95 per cent. of an estimated normal. However, inasmuch as the number of unemployed three years ago was roughly 14,000,000 and now is roughly 10,000,000, we have a long, long way to go after we pass "normal" before we approach that "more abundant life."

A prostrate banking system has been repaired. Depositor confidence has been raised from the lowest to probably the highest in the nation's history; bank failures, once so common, seem a thing of the past.

Investors, for the first time, have been given a measure of protection—through the securities registration, stock market control and utility holding company laws.

Farmers' cash income last year was two and a half billions

<sup>1</sup> I am writing in April, 1936. It is possible, but I do not think probable, that the election in November will make the statement look foolish. If the election were held this month, the Administration would be returned to power—a statement which would be denied by no informed politician who was not himself a candidate or a Republican press agent.

larger than in 1932. F.C.A.<sup>1</sup> have stopped foreclosures. Bankruptcy prices have given way to profitable prices. Surpluses are down to manageable proportions. And despite a serious court setback, a national programme of planned production and soil conservation is again moving ahead.

Laws aimed toward social security are on the statute books. Experimental, they doubtless will require frequent revision. Many states have lagged in giving necessary co-operation. But the plan offers an economic cushion for future unemployment and for assured, if inadequate, incomes for the aged.

Labour has gained recognition of the right to bargain collectively, and means of enforcing that right have been provided. Labour's stake in industry has been recognized, through the Guffey Coal Act and other legislation.

Utility rates have been widely reduced, largely because of T.V.A.;<sup>2</sup> Federal co-operation has strengthened state control of rates; the electrification of farms has been pressed and new markets for electrical appliances thereby opened. And in the Tennessee Valley we have a laboratory for planned regional development.

A million city families have been saved from eviction by the H.O.L.C.,<sup>3</sup> and a number of private lending and insurance companies made solvent. And H.O.L.C.'s record of collections on its mortgages—the dregs of the real estate market—as well as R.F.C.'s<sup>4</sup> record of collections on billions loaned to finance and

<sup>1</sup> The Federal agency for providing cheap credit to farmers.

<sup>2</sup> The Tennessee Valley Authority, one of the most complicated of the New Deal experiments. In part this is a copy of the Swedish "yardstick" plan for forcing the public utilities to give equitable rates. The Authority has built huge dams in the Tennessee River, and from these it is planning to offer throughout the Tennessee Valley—which includes the whole of Tennessee, northern Mississippi and Alabama, western Virginia, and southern Kentucky—electric power at the lowest price compatible with paying for the plant and making a small profit. In part the T.V.A. is an effort to encourage small-scale local industries in a large area where one-crop farming has long been on the verge of bankruptcy. And in part the T.V.A. is an experiment in soil conservation over a district where erosion has long had its fatal way.

<sup>3</sup> A Federal agency for securing cheap credit to home owners.

<sup>4</sup> A Federal agency for making big-scale credit available to the industries whose collapse might have ruined, and would surely have terrified, the whole economic system.

industry, has proved that the government can do business in a business-like way.

Housing has been a major failure. One scheme after another has flopped—subsistence homesteads, limited-dividend housing corporations, direct slum clearance on speculative property, and other hopeful plans. However, (the government) has reduced the second-mortgage racket and provided for lower interest-guaranteed mortgage financing.

Fiscal affairs are in a bad shape. We're still operating on borrowed money, and have piled up a record gross national debt. Fundamental tax reforms still wait; the bulk of revenue still comes from invisible levies. The visible ability-to-pay taxes still rest on a narrow base.

In foreign affairs, Mr. Roosevelt has changed the United States from the surly bully of the Western Hemisphere to a friendly neighbour. But he has accepted a neutrality policy which provides only partial safeguards against involvement in foreign wars.

His reciprocal trade treaty programme is a vast improvement over Smoot-Hawleyism,<sup>1</sup> but he has yet to face the reality that we cannot collect foreign debts or greatly increase exports until we admit a much greater volume of imports.

The relief problem, greatest of the nation's burdens, is little nearer solution than it was three years ago. Those on relief are more adequately cared for, and some 3,500,000 bread-winners have actually been put to work, but the programme is costly and wasteful. The problem is still being handled as something temporary—and on borrowed money.

Mr. Roosevelt has permitted politicians to block extension of the merit system. He has tolerated mismanagement and inefficiency in many agencies. He has permitted government departments to work at cross purposes and promote confusion.

Admitting all blunders and minimizing all accomplishments, President Roosevelt can be said to have led this country out of chaos.

He has freed the country from despair and restored the faith of the average man.

A majority of the lower and middle classes still believe that he

<sup>1</sup> The super-high-tariff policy of the Republican Party which culminated in Mr. Hoover's Administration.



is sincerely striving to make this a better country. They believe he has the courage to do battle with greedy special interest and they love him for the enemies he has made.

## 2

That editorial is notable both for the accuracy of its statement of the good and the bad in the New Deal's legislation and for the accuracy of its picture of the plain man's judgment on Mr. Roosevelt. The Republicans are charging that the New Deal is an incomprehensible mess, that nobody understands what is happening, or why. As these lines are being written, Mr. Hoover has just said in a national broadcast, "There was a youngster once who told his father that the teacher wanted him to bring to school simple statements of the Einstein theory and of the New Deal. Father said, 'We will begin with the Einstein theory. That is easier.'" In my opinion the reverse is true. The people who hate the New Deal do not hate it because they have no idea what it is all about. They hate it because they know too well where it is going, and because a sound instinct tells them that their own privileges will be impaired if the American Commonwealth reaches that place.

Through a long period of big business domination, fostered by the Republican Party, the American people have experimented with a privileged class whose privileges were founded on stock-market wealth. The class has proved itself lacking in responsibility, lacking in the rudiments of *noblesse oblige*. The American people now intend, if possible, to withdraw the privileges which have been abused and to lay the foundations for a real experiment in democracy. The experiment may end in bitter failure, but that will not be because the present rulers of America do not know where they want to come out. It will be because they do not know how to reach that end.

In a recent article in *Scribner's Magazine*, Mr. Struthers

Burt, the popular novelist, expresses the average American's contempt for America's "upper classes." Mr. Burt's theme is that the rich and great along the Atlantic Seaboard, the people who by birth and opportunity should form an American *élite*, have proved themselves bankrupt in mind and morals under the challenge of the New Deal. Mr. Burt points out to these people that, all questions of patriotism or honour aside, they are in danger of losing their position if in a time like the present they cannot rise above insignificance.

It is the rôle of intelligent self-preservation [writes Mr. Burt] not to be in time of crisis venal, unimaginative, self-seeking and inert.

Yet these words are gentle when compared with what might be said. There is something savage in the thoughtlessness and lack of perspective of these people, whom Mr. Burt calls the coast-dwellers.

They are having tribal dances [he says] almost every hour of the day and night; at breakfast and luncheon, too. The witch-doctors and medicine-men have adorned themselves with all their feathers and all the trophies of their former cures and victories. The bonfires are lit, but so far, let him search who will, it has been impossible to detect one single note of unselfishness, one clear flame of alert Americanism, or one thud of the drums that does not catch up and repeat monotonously the hollow reverberation—money.

After many years of living in what he affectionately calls "the sticks," Mr. Burt visited these coastal tribes last summer. His article is an expression of his shocked surprise at finding that these attractive-looking people (gracious, cultivated, urbane) felt not one touch of responsibility, showed not one spark of *noblesse oblige*.

My own experience has been so similar to Mr. Burt's that I can understand his wild surprise at finding himself among these well-bred anachronisms. After many years in England I made a long trip through America, mostly

through the Mississippi Valley and the Far West. It was not until I had revisited the rest of the country, and had been startled by its growth in political consciousness during the past decade, that I returned to the Eastern seaboard and found that there my old friends had been preserved in camphor since the 'twenties. They had no idea what was being thought in America. They had no idea what was being thought in Europe. The intellectuals among them still cherished that adolescent mixture of defeatism and vaguely left-wing politics which marked the early 'twenties in Europe. The non-intellectuals still showed signs of thinking Mr. Coolidge was a great man.

Time had stood still for these people, and the result was anything but pretty. They did not think that any important change had come into the world; they merely thought they were suffering from a temporary plague of *Democrats*. *They seemed to feel that these Democrats* were like the seventeen-year locusts—pesky, but certainly not permanent.

And the few people, among these shining coast-dwellers, who saw there was something seriously wrong with the world, had arrived as Mr. Burt puts it

at the somewhat baffling conclusion that those who are trying to do something about it are busybodies and tyrants. Mind you, they do not say that these busybodies are mistaken in their methods, which may be quite possible, they attack by implication, whether conscious of this implication or not, the fundamental intention of trying to right obvious wrong.

This brings Mr. Burt to the charge I made in the previous chapter, that the present Opposition is unworthy of the Republican Party.

Among the coast-dwellers [writes Mr. Burt] save for individual voices in direct opposition, belonging to pariahs speedily silenced by the peculiarly raucous tones of the well-bred when aroused, there is to be heard not a solitary altruistic argument, not a

solitary plan that has for its basis patriotism or vision. . . . Never before in our history has there been a more near-sighted Opposition; never before in our history has there been a greater need for a candid, thoughtful and unselfish one.

What curse has fallen on America that she does not produce an *élite* dowered with dignity and with the patriotism that leads to sacrifice? The privileged class showed patriotism during the War; but the truth is that the War was looked upon as fun. Joining the Army or Navy was felt to be a lark. But it is not fun to lose money, and it is not fun to think. My indictment of the privileged class in America is that the vast majority of its members cannot do the former gracefully and cannot do the latter at all.

America has lavished a lot of money on these people; now, America has need of them, but they do not seem to have anything to offer. Out of all that leisure, all that travel, all that good health and that complicated education—how few ideas, how few generous gestures, how few examples of the way proud men meet trouble; but how much rancour, how many whispered lies about the President's health, how many proofs that America wasted her benefits when she gave them to these men.

This is the sort of talk which the coast-dwellers call "setting class against class." But the accusation does not take hold. I myself have sat at too many dinner-tables in New York and Boston, listening to coast-dwellers abuse President Roosevelt as "a traitor to his class." These men have a class-consciousness that would do credit to a communist. That is the worst indignity which has befallen the American *élite*—that its class-consciousness is greater than its patriotism.

Mr. Burt ends his article with the suggestion that the coast-dwellers, instead of bothering with a Republican nominating convention, could get their ideal candidate by putting the following advertisement in the papers:

Wanted, for service in Washington, combination valet and butler. White, Protestant, willing to learn, accustomed to taking orders. Respectful manners more important than brains.

The coast-dwellers are Mr. Roosevelt's prime enemies—which illustrates what the *Indianapolis Times* meant by saying that the American people "love him for the enemies he has made."

## 3

Returning to the editorial from the *Indianapolis Times*, it should be said that there are many Democrats who would not accept this flattering picture of Mr. Roosevelt's Administration. There are many Democrats who are not New Dealers. Some of Mr. Roosevelt's bitterest enemies are ex-leaders of the Democratic Party, such as Mr. "Al" Smith, and Mr. John W. Davis, unsuccessful candidate for the Presidency in 1924 and American Ambassador to the Court of St. James in the last days of President Wilson. Mr. Smith was a member of the Democratic Party because he belonged to the New York City immigrant group which has always been welcomed and cherished by Tammany Hall;<sup>1</sup> Mr. Davis was a member of the Democratic Party, presumably, because he was by birth a Southerner. Neither of these gentlemen shared the traditional view of life of the old Jeffersonian or Jacksonian Party, or of the party when it was half-reborn under Bryan. Now that the party is returning to its origins, and reaffirming its basic principles, its accidental friends are very sensibly leaving it.

Parallel to this desertion by important Democrats, the Democratic Party is finding new friends among Republicans. Two of the most important men in Mr. Roosevelt's Cabinet—Mr. Henry Wallace and Mr. Harold

<sup>1</sup> The dominant New York City political machine, which happens to be Democratic.



Ickes—are ex-Republicans. Both these men are from the Middle West, where Republicanism was once almost as deeply rooted as Democracy in the South. In the Middle West the Republican Party was loved for its free-land policy and because it had saved the Union, which was interpreted as the salvation of American democracy. To-day, when the Republican Party is emerging more and more clearly as the friend of big business in its struggle to avoid the social restrictions being imposed by the New Deal, many traditional Republicans deserting the camp of their fathers.<sup>1</sup>

The new political alignment, which seems destined to emerge if the New Deal wins the election in the autumn of 1936, is shown in the accompanying map. It will be noticed that on this map the Middle West and the South form an almost solid bloc. When the two great sections in the Mississippi Valley can co-operate, as they did in the heyday of Jacksonian Democracy before the Civil War, they are strong enough (with help from the Pacific coast) to run the country. When they are divided, as they were divided by the Republicans in 1860 (and as they have remained divided almost ever since), the financial and industrial East can control America. The election of 1936 will determine whether Mr. Roosevelt has succeeded in reuniting the Mississippi Valley.

If Mr. Roosevelt should beat his enemies even in the East (winning Pennsylvania or New Jersey or New York—or all three, which is possible), that should not be misinterpreted. Those States will be temporary allies, won by his own popularity. But if he builds an almost solid Mississippi Valley behind the Democratic Party,

<sup>1</sup> One of the few Republican leaders who is wholly anti-big business is Senator William Borah, who is seeking the Presidential nomination—unsuccessfully, I feel sure. Senator Borah represents the old-fashioned Progressive wing of the Republican Party, now for the most part defunct, which goes back to the days of Theodore Roosevelt.

he will have laid the foundation for a major shift of power—a shift which should change the course of American history and prove of no little importance in the history of the world.

If the New Deal wins the election of 1936, something like the old Farmer-Labour Party of Jackson and Jefferson will emerge, seeking to implement a plan along the lines which I described in Chapter Nine. America will have undertaken to develop her own way of life, to grow so far as possible in accordance with the native American pattern, to make so far as possible an original contribution to history. The same result will probably follow if the Republican Party wins the election of 1936 and tries to return to the unlamented 'twenties. Such a policy would breed a quick reaction. But if the Republican Party wins the election and has the wit to confuse every issue, to ratify the more popular acts of the New Deal while throwing overboard the philosophy that gives those acts a point, then America may have to wait until after her next economic or social collapse for the much-needed realignment of parties and clarification of ideas. By that time it may be too late. The friends of the true American dream, who are still strong and influential, may by that time have been driven in despair toward the Left. No one, I think, could endure another decade of "prosperity" masquerading as a moral principle.